

A
D E F E N C E
O F
C H R I S T I A N I T Y.

In Two P A R T S.

P A R T I.

The LAW OF NATURE considered and shewn
to be consistent with Reason, and itself — and
the Attention to it, productive of the ut-
most Benefit to Mankind.

P A R T II.

The Authority and Usefulness of REVELATION
and the Sacred Writings, asserted and vin-
dicated, against the several Objections made
to them by the Deists in general, and in
particular by the Author of

Christianity as old as the Creation.

VOL I. *K*

By JOHN LELAND, D. D.

The SECOND EDITION, Corrected.

L O N D O N:

Printed for JOHN WARD. at the *King's-Arms* in *Cornhill*,
opposite the *Royal-Exchange*.

M. DCC. LIII.

DEFENCE

OF

CHRISTIANITY

In Two Parts

Part I.

A Law of Nature confirmed and shown
to be consistent with Reason, and that—
Attention to its precepts of
Benefit to Mankind



Authority of Revelation
and the Sacred Writings, and
against the various Objections made
to them by the Deists in general, and in
particular by the Author of

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M D C C L I I I

A N
A N S W E R
T O A
B O O K

INTITULED,

Christianity as Old as the Creation.

PART I.

In which that Author's Account of the
Law of Nature is consider'd, and his
Scheme is shewn to be inconsistent
with Reason and with itself, and of
ill Consequence to the Interests of
Virtue, and the Good of Mankind.

By *JOHN LELAND*, D.D.





PREFACE.

AT a Time when such bold and open Attempts are made against all Reveal'd Religion, I think no Man ought to be blam'd for his well-meant Endeavours to defend our common Christianity; and if the Reader will be so candid as to believe that my appearing in the present Controversy proceeds from an honest Zeal for what I take to be the Cause of God and true undefil'd Religion, I shall not be solicitous to make any other Apology.

The Book to which this is an Answer is generally own'd to be written with great Art, and in a manner very proper to make an Impression on those that will not give themselves the trouble of close Thinking, which must be own'd to be the Character of the Generality of Readers. It has a fair Semblance of Moderation and Love to Mankind. The Author professes a great Regard and Veneration for the Deity, and a Concern for his Honour in the World, and for the Interests of Virtue and Morality, of which he speaks in very high Terms. He proposes a Way to make the World easy and happy, and to deliver Men from the most formidable Evils, Superstition, Priestcraft, and

Persecution, and from those vain Terrors with which they are so apt to perplex and torment themselves. It is under such specious Pretences as these, that he carries on his Design of destroying all reveal'd Religion, and intirely subverting the Authority of the Scriptures.

His Work is indeed sufficiently confus'd; he has observ'd little Order or Method in it; and he frequently repeats the same Things; and it is probable he judg'd this Way of Writing wou'd best answer his Design; but it has made it a difficult Thing to give a full Answer to his Book. When I first attempted making Animadversions upon it, I intended to follow the Author exactly, and to make distinct Remarks on each Chapter, according to the Order in which they are plac'd in his Book; but after I had made some Progress this Way, I found it engag'd me in so many Repetitions, and render'd the Work so irregular, that I was oblig'd to alter my Method, and have now cast this Answer into two Parts, in which I have endeavour'd to bring together, under proper Heads, the several Things scatter'd in different Parts of his Book.

In the first Part, I consider the Account this Author gives of the Law of Nature, and the Scheme of Religion he wou'd introduce, and which he represents as so beautiful and charming, and highly beneficial to Mankind, with a View to shew that all external Revelation is perfectly needless and useless. I endeavour to lay open the Inconsistencies of his Scheme; that it is far from deserving the magnificent
Epithets

Epithets he himself so liberally bestows upon it; that it is of pernicious Consequence to the Interests, even of natural Religion, taken in its just Extent, for which yet he professes so great a Zeal, and to the Cause of Virtue in the World; and that the Advantages he proposes may be much better obtain'd by the Assistance of external Revelation than without it.

The second Part is more particularly design'd to obviate the Objections this Writer has advanc'd against the Revelation contain'd in the sacred Writings of the Old and New Testament. He has not only attempted to invalidate the Proofs and Evidences on which the Authority of that Revelation is founded, and to shew that they are uncertain and not to be depended on, but has endeavour'd to draw Arguments from the very Nature of that Revelation, to prove that it is unworthy of God; that far from being of Use to direct the People in their Faith and Practice, it tends rather to mislead them to wrong Apprehensions of God and of their Duty; and to this End he has, with great Art and Diligence, and with equal Malice rak'd together, whatever he thought might be proper to expose the holy Scriptures. I have endeavour'd fairly to consider what he offers, to obviate his Objections, and detect his Misrepresentations.

Several good Answers have been already publish'd; but I had drawn up the Substance of these Remarks before I read any of them, except Mr. Foster's ingenious Performance; but his Method is so different from mine, and I take so

much larger a Compass than he has done, that the View of his Book did not hinder me from going on with my Design. I think it of no great Importance to the World to inform them why this was not publish'd sooner; if I had seen any that had consider'd the Author's Book so fully as I have done, this would not have been publish'd at all. The Extent of the Design I had form'd has render'd this Answer much larger than I could have wish'd. Perhaps it may be thought that I have insisted on a more particular Confutation of some Things in the Author's Book than they really deserv'd, and I confess this is my own Opinion. But as I have frequently observ'd, that Objections that seem'd to me very slight and unworthy of Notice, have appear'd to others in a very different Light, I thought it would be wrong to pass them by; and probably in that Case it might have been pretended, that they were left unanswer'd for another Reason than their Weakness: tho' after all, I have omitted several Things that I had prepar'd, and have considerably abridg'd others for fear of being too tedious. Not to trouble the Reader with any more Excuses or Apologies, I shall only advertise him that, in the following Answer, I have all along quoted the Author's Book, according to the first Edition in Quarto. 5 JY 61

N. B. In this Edition, for the greater Convenience of the Reader, besides the References to the Quarto Edition of *Christianity as old, &c.* which stand as they did before, there are added References all along at the Bottom of the Page to the Octavo Edition of that Book; this being much better known than that in Quarto.

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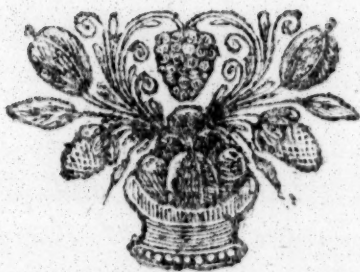
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T H E

I N T R O D U C T I O N.

AS an Introduction to the following Answer, I shall lay together some Observations on the Author's Spirit and Design and Manner of treating the Subject he has undertaken, and shall at the same time endeavour to set before the Reader a general View of the present Controversy. t

This Writer tells us, that he has chosen to debate it in a way of Dialogue; *this being esteem'd by the Ancients the most proper as well as the most prudent Way of exposing prevailing Absurdities.* I shall not find fault with this; every Man has a Right to chuse that Way of Writing which he thinks properest to answer the End, and which he apprehends himself best qualified for. And I own this is a very good way of Writing where the Debate is manag'd fairly and impartially, where the Dialogists strictly preserve their Characters, and the Arguments of the several Parties are justly represented in their full Force; so it is in *Cicero's* Dialogues, which this Writer mentions and pretends to imitate. But where these Rules are not observ'd, no way of Writing is more fallacious, or fitter to betray the Cause of Truth. Because a Man may make his Adversaries, those whom he has a mind to expose, talk as he pleases, and may easily state the Arguments he thinks proper to put into their Mouths in such a Manner, that he shall find it no difficult matter to answer them. p

We need go no further for an Instance of this, than our Author's Way of managing the Subject he has undertaken. I don't remember one Argument in behalf of Revelation clearly stated and represented in its proper Force, in his whole Book. And tho' he sometimes puts something that looks like Argument into the mouth of his pretended Christian Dialogist B. he does it in such a manner that it is manifest he only introduces him as a Christian the more effectually to betray and expose the Cause of Christianity. He makes him often talk in a manner little agreeable to the Character of a Christian, and puts some of the bitterest Paragraphs in his whole Book into his mouth. I do not complain of this merely as a manifest Breach of Decorum, or of the Rules to be observ'd in all Writings of this kind, but as a great want of Candor, and as wilful Misrepresentation.

As little can I reconcile it to that Sincerity and Candor that becomes a fair Writer and an impartial Inquirer after Truth, that at the same time that this Gentleman uses his utmost Endeavours to shew that there never was or cou'd be any external divine Revelation, and that all Pretences of this kind have been owing to Superstition, Enthusiasm, or Imposture, he yet frequently professes a great Regard for Christianity. He pretends to believe that *Christianity is the external, as natural Religion is the internal Revelation of the same unchangeable Will of God; and that they differ only in the manner of being communicated*, p. 3. Where he speaks as if he believ'd Christianity to be a real external divine Revelation. And he proposes *greatly to advance the Honour of external Revelation, by shewing the perfect Agreement between that and internal Revelation*, p. 8. He declares that he intirely agrees with Bp. Chandler, "That Christianity it self stript of the Additions
" that Policy, Mistakes, and the Circumstances of
" Time

“ Time have made to it, is a most holy Religion.
 “ And that true Christianity is so far from being in-
 “ defensible, that it carries its own Evidences with it;
 “ or in other Words, all its Doctrines plainly speak
 “ themselves to be the Will of an infinitely wise and
 “ good God, &c. p. 422, 423.” One wou’d be
 apt to think from such Passages as these, that this
 Author heartily believes the divine Authority of the
 Gospel, and only rejects the corrupt Additions that
 have been made to it in After-Ages; but he that
 shou’d judge this to be his Sentiment, wou’d form
 a very wrong Notion of his Design. By Christia-
 nity which he here so highly commends, he does
 not mean what every body else means by it, the
 whole of that Revelation that was publish’d by Christ
 and his Apostles in the Name of God, but purely
 and simply what he elsewhere calls the Religion of
 Nature. And in this Sense he tells us, that “ true
 “ Christianity is not a Religion of yesterday, but
 “ what God at the Beginning dictated and still con-
 “ tinues to dictate to all Men, Christians as well as
 “ others, and that it is as Old and as Extensive as
 “ human Nature, &c. p. 4, 8.” Thus, this Gen-
 tleman has found out an Expedient for intitling him-
 self and his Friends to the Character of true Chri-
 stians, at the same time that they endeavour to sub-
 vert the Authority of the Christian Revelation. And
 at this rate *Julian* and *Porphry* might have call’d
 themselves true Christians, whilst they blasphem’d
Jesus as an Impostor, and rejected his Religion as
 a Cheat.

It is with the same Spirit of Candor that our Au-
 thor declares his Apprehensions, that *for so laudable*
an Attempt as reconciling Reason and Revelation,
which have been so long set at variance, he shou’d
be censur’d as a Free-Thinker; but that he is far
from being asham’d of that Title, however invidious
it may seem; since we may as well suppose a Man can

reason without thinking at all, as reason without thinking freely. He adds, that *the irreconcilable Enemies of Reason, seeing it too gross in this Reasoning Age to attack Reason openly, do it covertly under the Name of Free-thinking,* p. 180. For my Part, I shall never be one of those that shall censure this Author and those of his Way as Free-thinkers. I know no People in the World that have a less Pretence to this Character taken in the just and laudable Sense than they. No where do I see greater Marks of Bigotry and Prejudice. For what greater Proof of Prejudice can there be, than to reject that Evidence for Facts when brought in favour of Christianity, which they themselves wou'd think sufficient in any other Case; and to admit those Objections when brought against the Scriptures, which they wou'd reject and despise, if brought against any other Book in the World? It is well known that some of our most celebrated modern Free-thinkers, have taken no small pains to shew that there is no such Thing as human Liberty, or Free-Agency, which is to leave no room for thinking or acting freely at all. There are others, who seem to have no other Notion of thinking freely, than thinking loosely and superficially; a profane Jest passes for an Answer to a solid Argument, and it is thought a sufficient Reason for rejecting an Opinion, that it is an old Opinion, that their Fathers held it, and the Priests teach it. This strange Bigotry to Novelty, and Affectation of thinking out of the common Way, is no less prejudicial to sound Reason, and a just Discernment of Things, than the blind Bigotry to old Opinions and Practices, which has so often been a hindrance to a fair search after Truth. In opposition to both these, a just and generous Liberty of Thought carries a Man to judge equally, calmly, and impartially, and to consider and weigh the Evidence with a Mind open to Conviction, and free
from

from vicious Prejudices; and this is so far from being an Enemy to Christianity, that it is that Disposition of Mind which best disposes a Man to embrace it.

This Gentleman indeed thinks proper to bestow the genteel Epithet of *the irreconcilable Enemies to Reason* on the Advocates for Revelation. To shew what unreasonable People they are, he very formally sets himself in his 12th Chapter to prove against them that *Men must use their Reason in Matters of Religion*; and that *Religion cannot oblige us not to be govern'd by Reason*. And he there represents Christian Divines, as supposing that *some Things in Revelation are contrary to Reason*, and yet at the same Time maintaining that *they are the Will of God*, p. 179. And again, as contending that *that only is to be admitted as the Will of God which is reveal'd, tho' ever so inconsistent with the Light of Nature, and the eternal Reason of Things*; where he unfairly insinuates that they suppose some Things which God has reveal'd to be inconsistent with the Light of Nature, and the eternal Reason of Things. This is gross Misrepresentation. And what renders our Author more inexcusable in it is, that he elsewhere takes upon him to affirm, that all Divines now agree, *that there is a Law of Reason which God cannot dispense with, and that no external Revelation can be true that is inconsistent with it*, p. 189.

Our Author gives a Specimen of what the Advocates for Revelation may expect from him, even those of 'em for whom he pretends the greatest Esteem, in his Treatment of the learned Dr. *Samuel Clark*, of whom he professes to be a great Admirer. The 14th Chapter of his Book is almost wholly taken up in examining the Doctor's Discourse of the *unchangeable Obligations of natural Religion, and the Truth and Certainty of the Christian Revelation*. And if he had represented the Doctor's Arguments

fairly, no body wou'd have blam'd him for endeavouring to answer them. But I have scarce met with any thing more unfair or disingenuous than his whole Management on this Occasion. I have mention'd some Instances of it, as it lay in my way to vindicate some of the Arguments the Doctor had advanc'd in defence of our common Christianity, and I cou'd easily have added more.

I never saw an Author more liberal than this Gentleman is, in the Encomiums he bestows upon his own Performance. Several of his last Pages are almost wholly taken up in a Panegyrick upon it, besides many Passages throughout his Book that look this way. This Work of his was, as I have been inform'd, the Labour of some Years, long promis'd and much boasted of before it appear'd, as well as greatly extoll'd since. But I hope it will appear from an impartial Consideration of what he has advanc'd, that Christianity has nothing to apprehend from this Adversary more than from others that have gone before him in the same Cause. It must be own'd that he undertakes largely. He pretends to shew not merely that Revelation is not necessary, but that it is absolutely useless, and cannot possibly be of any Advantage at all. In this he has the general Sense of Mankind against him. For he himself tells us, that *perhaps there never was a Place or Time where some Revelation was not believ'd*, p. 184.

I know these Gentlemen have one general Way of accounting for all these Things, and that is, by ascribing them to the Artifices of the Priests. But if Mankind had not been generally sensible of their Need of an extraordinary Revelation, and the Advantage this wou'd be of to them, if this had not been the Voice of Nature and Reason, the Priests wou'd not have had it in their power to have grafted so much upon it. As if Reason had not taught Men
that

that God is to be worshipped, there wou'd not have been so many Kinds of false Worship in the World. Though therefore these Gentlemen shou'd accomplish their Design (which God forbid) of banishing the Christian Religion from these Nations, I don't see but the People wou'd be still as much in danger as ever of Priestcraft and Imposture, and of being led aside by false Revelations, and far more so. For a true divine Revelation is the best Security against falsely pretended ones; and if this were once remov'd, they wou'd be left at large to be practis'd upon by artful and designing Men.

Indeed the Author can never prove what he undertakes, *viz.* that external Revelation cannot be of any Use or Advantage at all, except he can maintain such a Sufficiency of Reason and Nature's Light, as to make all Assistance and Instruction unnecessary. For if Instruction be needful, notwithstanding the suppos'd Clearness of the Light of Nature, then external Revelation (which is an Instruction from God additional to that natural Light) can never be prov'd useless. And if it wou'd be an excellent Design in any Man that has just Notions of Things, to endeavour to reclaim and recover Mankind from Ignorance and Superstition and Vice, then on Supposition that God shou'd for the Instruction of Mankind, and for recovering them from the Darkness they labour'd under, send some Persons and in an extraordinary manner guide and inspire them, that they might declare to the World in his Name what they thus receiv'd; and if he shou'd in an extraordinary Way interpose to give the most illustrious Attestations to their divine Mission, to convince the World that he sent them, there is nothing in this but what is worthy of God, and a signal Instance of his Condescension and Goodness, and of great Benefit to Mankind.

Our Author is sensible of this, and therefore his Arguments tend to prove that Men need no Instruction of any kind; that all Men are naturally so clear-sighted, and have such a perfect Knowledge of the Whole of their Duty, and of every thing that is of Importance to them to know, that they stand in no need of any Instruction or Information at all; every Man is able without difficulty to form a right Scheme of Religion for himself, nor can these Things possibly be made clearer to any Man by any external Means whatsoever, than they are to all Men without it. A strange Hypothesis this! and which is so contrary to evident Fact and Experience, and to the Observation of all Ages, that one wou'd wonder how any Man cou'd seriously undertake to prove it. It is a romantick Scheme, no more suited to Mankind than if calculated for another Order of Beings. I shall make no other Reflection upon it at present than to observe, that this goodly Scheme tends to prove, that all other Books written on religious or moral Subjects, the noblest Subjects in the World, and the best worth writing upon, are useless as well as the Bible, and that every Man must be left merely to himself, and to what the Author calls the pure simple Dictates of the Light of Nature, without any Instruction at all. And I think if we must judge from Experience, the certain Effect of this wou'd be to introduce universal Ignorance and Barbarism.

The Arguments he makes use of to support his Hypothesis are as extraordinary as the Hypothesis it self. The Substance of what he offers to shew, that the Law of Nature is clear to all Men in its just Extent, amounts to this, that it is founded in the Nature and Reason of Things, that the Principles and Duties of that Law are in themselves very reasonable, and such as right Reason duly exercis'd must approve; and he thinks this sufficient to shew,

that

that therefore they are plain and obvious to all Mankind, and what they must needs know and discern of themselves, without any external Assistance or Information. This is the Course of his Reasoning in many Parts of his Book, which depends upon this Principle, that whatever is in it self true and reasonable, founded in the Nature of Things, and capable of being prov'd, is for that Reason obvious and evident to all Mankind, and they can easily find it out of themselves, and need no Information about it. A Principle manifestly false, and contrary to daily Observation and Experience, and which wou'd prove that even the most difficult Part of the Mathematicks, yea that the whole Compass of Truth is obvious and evident to all Mankind; for all Truth is agreeable to the Nature of Things, and, when discover'd and explain'd, approves it self to right unprejudic'd Reason.

It is upon the same Principle that he proceeds, when he argues (as he frequently does) that if Revelation contains nothing but what is agreeable to Reason and to the Nature or Relations of Things, this proves that that Revelation contains nothing but what we knew before, or might as easily have known without that Revelation as with it; and that since we are to judge by our Reason whether a Revelation and its Doctrines be worthy of God, this shews that we already actually knew those Doctrines antecedently to such Revelation, and consequently need no Revelation to inform us of them or instruct us in them. This is the Strain of his Argument in many Places. And he asks, when he sums up the Argument in the Conclusion of his Book, p. 424. *Are not all of my Sentiments, who own that Revelation contains all things worthy of having God for its Author?* This is very odd, that those that believe the Christian Revelation in all its Doctrines and Precepts to be worthy of God and a true divine Revelation, must for that reason

reason be of his Sentiments, who thinks there neither is nor ever was any true external divine Revelation at all. But let us hear what he adds to prove that they must be of his Sentiments. *For that supposes* (says he) *that Reason antecedently to Revelation can tell them what is or what is not worthy of having God for its Author.* The Meaning of the Argument is plainly this, that if upon Examination we find that Revelation appears to us to be worthy of God, and agreeable to Reason, this proves that we knew every thing contain'd in that Revelation before it was thus reveal'd, and that therefore it was intirely uselefs. A poor Fallacy, which yet runs thro' a great part of his Book, since nothing is plainer than that many Things appear to us when once discover'd to be very just, and to have nothing contrary to Reason, which yet we shou'd never have found out of our selves without such a Discovery. It will be easily own'd, that Reason and common Sense is necessary to our judging of the Evidence of Revelation, and of the Sense of that Revelation; but it does not follow that because Reason and common Sense is necessary to our understanding and judging of Revelation, and of all Books whatsoever, that therefore Reason and common Sense is alone and of it self sufficient to find out whatever can be at any time discover'd to us, and that no Persons or Writings can ever inform us of any thing but what we knew or might as easily have known of our selves before. Suppose a Man shou'd take it into his head to affirm, that Sir *Isaac Newton* had discover'd nothing in his Writings, but what all the World knew before; and shou'd prove it thus: all those must be of my Sentiments in this matter, who maintain that his Writings contain nothing but what is agreeable to Reason, and founded in the Nature of Things; for this supposes that every Man's own Reason antecedently to his Writings was acquainted with

with these Things, and cou'd easily have found them out without his Information. The Argument is ridiculous, and yet it is exactly parallel to the Reasoning this Gentleman frequently makes use of, in order to shew that an external Revelation is useless, and can inform Mankind of nothing but what they actually knew, or might as easily have known before.

It is in the same strain that this Author frequently argues, from what human Understanding, absolutely speaking, is capable of knowing, to what all Men actually do know, and from what right Reason, when duly exercis'd and improv'd to the utmost, is capable of discerning, to what is obvious to common Reason in the present State of Mankind. He often talks of the Law of Nature's being *internally reveal'd*, in order to shew that any external Revelation is absolutely useless. He carries it so far as to affirm, that *God cou'd not more fully make known his Will to all intelligent Beings than he has done this way*; no, though *he had miraculously convey'd to all Men the same Ideas*, p. 19, 27. And yet, at other times, when he comes to explain himself, the Meaning of all these magnificent Expressions is no more than this, that God has made Men capable of knowing the Law of Nature, or has given them Faculties which, if duly improv'd, are capable of discerning that Law. And if every thing must be said to be internally reveal'd to every Man which, absolutely speaking, he is capable of knowing, then it must be said that the whole Compass of Arts and Sciences is internally reveal'd to every Man, and so are numberless Things which now we do not know, but which we have a Capacity of knowing; the Longitude is actually discover'd, or whenever it is found out, it may be easily prov'd, according to this way of arguing, that it was actually reveal'd or discover'd long before.

These

These kind of Reasonings which run thro' the Author's Book, and which lie at the Foundation of all that he offers to shew, that an external Revelation is absolutely needless and useless, may perhaps appear too trifling to deserve a distinct Answer, but when we consider the End they are design'd to serve, then these Trifles become serious, and require to be answer'd, or at least expos'd. It is indeed a tedious Employment for an Answerer to go thro' a detail of such Reasonings and Instances, but it ought to reconcile him to it, that it may be of service to the World to enter on a particular Examination of Arguments, which however trifling in themselves, may yet do mischief, especially when plausibly propos'd in a general way, as they usually are by this Writer, who has the Art to set off very weak Reasonings, and give them a plausible Turn and an Air of Probability 'till they be closely examin'd.

I think it deserves to be remark'd, that this Author himself, more than once supposes, that it wou'd be worthy of God to send some Persons to reclaim Mankind to the Practice and Observation of the Law of Nature; now if because Men have undeniably fallen from the Law of Nature in their Practice, therefore it might be worthy of God to send Persons to recover them to the Observation of that Law, then supposing Men to have fallen from the Knowledge of that Law, in some of its important Branches and Principles, it may be worthy of God to send some Persons to recover Men to the right Knowledge of that Law; and supposing there are some Things the Knowledge of which wou'd be of considerable Importance to our Happiness, and to promote the Practice of Righteousness, which either cou'd not be known at all, or not with a satisfying Certainty, without an extraordinary Revelation, it may be worthy of God to commission some Persons extraordinarily for that Purpose: and in that Case,

it wou'd be proper to give them sufficient Credentials to convince the World of their divine Mission.

In order therefore to prove that there can be no Place, or Use for any extraordinary Revelation, either it must be said, that the Bulk of Mankind are not in a State of Darknefs and Corruption, tho' this is undeniable Fact; or that tho' they be, it is not possible for God, or not worthy of him to communicate his Will in an extraordinary Way to Mankind, for recovering them from that State of deplorable Ignorance and Corruption; or that, supposing him to communicate his Will by extraordinary Revelation, he has no Way of giving a sufficient Proof and Evidence to convince Mankind that he has given such a Revelation. The Author attempts, by turns, to prove each of these; tho' in each of them he has both the Reason of the Thing, and the common Sense of Mankind against him.

If we proceed from his Reasonings against Revelation in general, and take a brief View of those he has advanc'd against the Revelation contain'd in the holy Scriptures, they will not appear to be more just or better founded.

If God gives any extraordinary Revelation at all to Mankind, the most easy and familiar Way, and the best accommodated to the Condition of Mankind, seems to be this, that he shou'd speak to us by Men like ourselves. It cannot reasonably be denied, that God may have many Ways of communicating a certain Knowledge of Things to particular Persons to be by them communicated to others. And it is as evident that those Persons that are thus extraordinarily sent and inspir'd of God, may communicate to others what they themselves thus receive from God, as it is that one Man may communicate his own Sentiments and Ideas of Things to others by Speech and Language. And if the

the Revelation itself, or the System of Laws and Doctrines might be communicated by word of Mouth to the Persons that liv'd in the Age when it was first given, then it was also capable of being committed to Writing, together with an Account of the illustrious Facts whereby it was originally attested and confirm'd; and those Writings might be transmitted with such a Measure of Evidence as is sufficient to convince any reasonable Man, that they are the genuine Writings, and that they come to us without any such material Corruption or Alteration as might destroy the Use of that Revelation. This is as evident, as it is that human Laws and Records, and the moral Instructions of wise and good Men, Philosophers and Law-givers, may be so transmitted for the Instruction and Information of Posterity; and he that shou'd deny this, wou'd but expose himself to the reasonable Part of Mankind, by carrying his Scepticism to a ridiculous degree. And it has been often shewn that we have greater Evidence for the safe Transmission of the sacred Writings to us, than of any other Books in the World.

Now what Method does the Author take to invalidate this, and shew that the Scripture-Revelation cannot be depended on? In order to prove that the Scripture is uncertain and not to be depended on, he has a long Harangue in his 13th Chapter, about the Uncertainty of Words and the various Meanings they are capable of. And what he offers on this Subject, if it proves any thing, tends to prove, that no Man can be certain of the Meaning of any Book, or of any Language whatsoever; and that Words and Language are of no use at all for communicating Knowledge, yea, that they rather tend to mislead Persons from attending to the Nature of the Things themselves; for he all along thinks proper to oppose Words to Things; that consequently
those

those that seek to improve their Knowledge by reading Books, by Conversation, &c. are for being govern'd (to use the Author's Expressions) not by Things, but by Words; and those only are govern'd by Things that have no Books or Instructions at all to mislead them, which is the happy Condition of the barbarous Savages. Thus in his Zeal to render the Scriptures useleſs, he produces Arguments which tend to prove that all Writings whatsoever are useleſs too. What a strange Prejudice against Christianity is this, as if provided this were but banish'd, these Gentlemen cou'd be content that all Learning and Knowledge were banish'd along with it!

It is owing to the same strong Prejudice against the Gospel-Revelation, that in order to invalidate the Evidence whereby this Revelation it self, with an Account of the principal Facts whereby it was originally attested, is transmitted to us, he advances Maxims which tend to shew that it is impossible for us to be sure of any thing that we our selves did not see, or which we are not able to demonstrate by Arguments drawn from the Nature of the Thing; that no Writing or Record can be depended on, that has pass'd through the Hands of *fallible* and *peccable Men*, that is, that no Record at all can be depended on, since all Mankind must be own'd to be both fallible and peccable: that we cannot believe the Testimony of any Man in any Case whatsoever, except we be sure that he is absolutely rais'd above all the Frailties of human Nature, and incapable during the whole Course of his Life of ever uttering a Falshood, or ever doing a wrong thing on any Occasion. Thus from an earnest Desire to destroy the Credit of the Facts, by which the Christian Revelation stands confirm'd, and of the Conveyance whereby that Revelation is transmitted to us, he destroys the Credit of all Testimony and all moral Evidence, And I think it is a considerable Presumption of
of

of the Strength of the Scripture-Evidence, that these Gentlemen cannot prove that it is not to be believ'd by any Arguments, but what wou'd equally prove that no Testimony at all is to be believ'd. The Man that wou'd pretend to argue thus in any other Case wou'd not be endur'd; and if these Maxims were put in practice, they wou'd soon produce the utmost Confusion in human Affairs, and dissolve all Faith and Credit among Men, without which Society cannot subsist.

To the clear and positive Proofs that are produc'd for the Facts by which the Gospel stands attested and confirm'd, he opposes only Suspicions of Fraud; and being not able to confront it with any Counter-Evidence, he supposes that there was some formerly, but that it is lost. Thus he saith, p. 300. *That all the Historical Evidence is lost but of one Side only.* And this is a Way of Talking that has been often used by the Gentlemen of that Way. But it is perfectly wild and unreasonable. At this rate it is impossible ever to be convinc'd of the Truth of any Facts done in past Ages. For still it may be said, How do we know but that there was Evidence on the other side, but it is lost? And if such Things may be precariously suppos'd without the least Proof, there will be no End of Suspicions. But what kind of Evidence is it that they suppose was lost, or what was that Evidence to prove? Was it that there was no such Person as Jesus? this is not so much as pretended. Or was it that he wrought no Miracles? neither was this pretended by those that had the best Opportunities to know, the first and eldest Enemies of Christianity. They cou'd not deny (as appears from several Testimonies of theirs still extant) that he perform'd some wonderful Works, but endeavour'd to ascribe them to his Skill in magical Arts. Or was it to prove that he was not crucified? but this is so far from being denied, that the Enemies

mies of the Gospel have all along reproach'd Christians with the infamous Death of the Author of their Religion: Or was this Evidence that is suppos'd to be lost, to prove that Jesus did not rise again? We have still remaining an Account of what the first Enemies of Christianity said on this Head. They pretended, that his Disciples feign'd his Resurrection, and stole away his Body whilst the Soldiers that were to guard it were asleep: And if they were asleep, how did they know the Disciples stole him? But in opposition to this, we have the positive Evidence of the Disciples themselves, who saw and convers'd with him after he rose from the Dead, and confirm'd their Testimony with their Blood. And it is evident in fact, that their Testimony was so circumstanc'd, and supported with such Evidence, that it was immediately receiv'd by thousands in the very Age in which the Fact was done, and on the Credit of it, vast Numbers all over the World, both of *Jews* and *Gentiles*, believ'd in a Saviour that had been crucified, and submitted to a Religion that had no worldly Advantages to recommend it, and which was absolutely contrary to all their inveterate Prejudices, their corrupt Appetites and Passions, and their worldly Interests; which can scarce be suppos'd, if there had been then any Evidence to prove that the first Publishers of Christianity were Cheats and Impostors, and that the Facts they appeal'd to were false, and publickly known to be so. *Celsus* indeed pretends, in a Passage cited by *Origen*, that he cou'd produce truer things concerning Jesus than what were written of him by his own Disciples, but that he willingly pass'd them by; see *Origen contra Cels. lib. 2. p. 67. Edit. Cantab.* But we may be sure he pass'd them by for no other Reason, but because he was sensible they were destitute of all Proof. And if there was no Counter-evidence against the Facts of the Gospel in *Celsus's* Time, which was in the

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second Century after our Saviour, or at least none which that subtle and malicious Enemy of Christianity thought proper to produce, we may well treat this suppos'd Counter-evidence, that is pretended to have been once extant, but to be now lost, as a mere groundless Imagination.

Our modern Deists frequently demand, that we shou'd produce Evidence of the main Facts of the Gospel from the Testimony of those who were not Christians, whom alone they will allow to be unsuspected Witnesses. We have Evidence, That there was such a Person as Jesus, who was crucified in the Reign of *Tiberius*; that he wrought wonderful Works, which his Enemies ascrib'd to Magick; that his Disciples were grown to a great Multitude in *Rome* it self even as early as in the Days of *Nero*; that they were expos'd to grievous Sufferings and Persecutions then and afterwards, which they endur'd with a wonderful Constancy; that vast Numbers were engag'd by this new Religion to abandon the Heathen Temples and Ceremonies; and that they were innocent in their Lives, and bound themselves under strong Engagements to the Practice of Righteousness. These things are attested by Heathen Authors, as appears from the noted Testimonies of *Tacitus*, *Pliny*, and *Celsus*. And what cou'd be reasonably desir'd more? Can it be expected that Jews and Pagans shou'd bear witness to Christ's Resurrection? If any one of them had declar'd that he was convinc'd of this Fact, it wou'd undoubtedly have been pretended, that this was foisted into his Writings, or else that he was a Christian, and therefore not to be regarded; though I know no Reason why the Testimony of those who from Jews or Pagans became Christians upon the Strength of that Evidence, in opposition to all their former Prejudices, and thereby gave the greatest Proof that they believ'd it and were convinc'd by it, shou'd be rejected.

I don't see therefore how it wou'd have been possible to have satisfied these Gentlemen, if there had been further Evidence produc'd.

With regard to the Objections the Author brings against the Revelation it self, to shew that it is unworthy of God, he allows himself strange Liberties. Here notwithstanding the fair Semblance of Moderation and Candor that he puts on, he has not been able to disguise his Malice. He gives full Scope to Misrepresentation and Ridicule, and betrays a determin'd Resolution to run down the Scriptures at any rate. I shall not enter on the Particulars here, which is sufficiently done in the second Part of the following Answer; but only observe in general, that if any Critick pretended to judge of the admir'd Writings of the Ancients by those Rules which this Gentleman and his Friends seem to think just with relation to the Scriptures, he wou'd be despis'd by all the World, and I doubt not by these Gentlemen themselves, as a forward, an impertinent, and malicious Censurer.

In order to prove the Scriptures unworthy of God, he is for taking every single Passage in the sacred Writings in the grossest literal Sense, without making any allowance for figurative Expressions at all. And at this rate the finest Writings in the World, and the noblest Passages in those Writings, might be turn'd into Nonsense and Absurdity. He turns the Faults of good Men recorded in Scripture to the disadvantage of the Scripture it self, as if it tended to lead the People astray, though the impartial recording their Failures is a signal Proof of the Veracity and Candor of the sacred Writers, and if they had endeavour'd to conceal or palliate those Faults, it wou'd have been made a stronger Objection against them, and with more Reason. And when he cannot deny that the moral Precepts of Scripture (which alone are to be the Rule of our Conduct) are good and excellent,

he has recourse to some Actions and Cases of an extraordinary Nature, which he strips of their most considerable Circumstances that he may the better expose them, though he himself makes the Morality of Actions depend wholly on the Circumstances Persons are in.

Indeed all that this Author seems solicitous about is, to heap up as many Objections as he can against the Scriptures, without concerning himself whether those Objections are consistent with one another, or whether they do not bear as hard upon natural Religion as upon reveal'd. Thus he frequently declaims on the great Uncertainty of what he calls traditional Religion, and the many Differences there are amongst Christians; and yet it's certain that there are as great Differences among those that have profess'd to be govern'd by the Law of Nature, and like this Author to fetch their Principles from the Reason and Nature of things, and that even in Points of the highest Consequence. And though he sets out in his first Chapter with an Account of an universal Religion which all Mankind have acknowledg'd, and in which they have at all Times agreed, though they have been endlessly divided in positive Matters, and about traditional Religion; yet the contrary is evident from undeniable Fact and Experience. It cannot be denied that Mankind have very much differ'd in their Notions, even with regard to that Part of the Law of Nature that relates to the Idea of God, and the Worship that is due to him, the Doctrine of Providence, a future State, &c. which yet lie at the Foundation of all Religion. It wou'd be wrong to argue from this, that therefore those Principles are in themselves uncertain and not to be depended on. For it is no Proof that a thing is uncertain, because Men have differ'd about it; since there is scarce any thing so plain or certain in Nature that has not been contested.

Yet

Yet thus it is that the Author argues against Revelation; though I think it ought to be observ'd to the Honour of it, that the main Principles of natural Religion have been no where so generally acknowledged, and so well understood, as by those that have had the Advantage of an extraordinary Revelation.

There is nothing in his whole Book which this Gentleman declaims more pathetically upon, than the miserable State which Christian Divines suppose the Heathen World to have been in, and that God left them in a State of great Degeneracy and Corruption for 4000 Years together. But is this a Difficulty peculiar to the Friends of Revelation? That the Heathens were universally over-run with Idolatry and Superstition, that they continued in this State for many Ages, and consequently that God suffer'd them to continue in that State, is a Matter of Fact which cannot possibly be denied; nor will this Author himself deny that this was a State of great Degeneracy and Corruption. I cannot therefore see upon what Foundation he can set up for entertaining more favourable Thoughts of the Heathens, than the Advocates for Revelation. 'Tis true, he supposes, that they shall not be condemn'd for not believing the Gospel which they never heard of; and we say so as well as he. But he supposes them to have counter-acted the Law of Nature, for he plainly makes that Idolatry and Superstition into which they had fallen to be a Defection from that original Law. The Difference between his Scheme and our's with regard to the Heathens lies here; that he supposes the Light they had to be far clearer than we think it was, and therefore leaves no room for the Plea of Ignorance, and consequently must look upon their Guilt as more inexcusable, and their Condemnation as more aggravated, in that they generally counter-acted the Law of Nature, which, according to him, *no well-meaning Gentile cou'd be*

ignorant of. Unless perhaps it will be some Consolation to the Gentiles, that he supposes Christians, Jews, and all Mankind in all Ages, except *the free-thinking Few*, to be involv'd in the same Condemnation, all chargeable with perverting and corrupting the Law of Nature, and shutting their Eyes against the most clear universal Light. These things I just hint at here, which are more largely consider'd in the following Answer.

Indeed some of the greatest Difficulties in his whole Book, and which leave the largest Scope for Declamation, lie not so much against Scripture as against Providence; and therefore are what he himself is equally oblig'd to account for. And I have occasion to observe more than once, that several of his Objections as he manages them have a very ill Aspect on the Interests of natural Religion, for which yet he professes so great a Zeal; as when he confounds God's causing Evil and his permitting it, and makes him the Author of the Evil he foresees and does not prevent, when it is in his power to do so. Objections which evidently lead to Atheism, and the Denial of a Providence.

There is an Objection which this Writer has advanc'd against the Scripture-Revelation, which I find I have not taken notice of in the Body of the Answer, and therefore shall say something to it here. He observes, that *the Scriptural and Philosophical Accounts of natural things seldom agree*, p. 209. But in order to make any thing of this Objection, he ought first to be sure that those philosophical Accounts which he pretends disagree with Scripture are the true and certain Accounts, which perhaps he wou'd find it very hard to shew; * and then that
supposing

* Even with relation to the Hypothesis he mentions, of the Sun's being immoveable, and that it is the Earth that moves, this is not absolutely and demonstrably certain, as some of the greatest Astronomers have own'd; concerning which, see *Nieuwentij's*

supposing a Revelation given, it shou'd treat all things with a philosophical Exactness, which is by no means necessary. As the proper Design of it is to be a Guide to the People in Religion and in Matters of Faith and Practice, it is sufficient if it directs them right here; and as to other things, they are mention'd only by the Bye, and in a Manner accommodated to the Capacity of the Vulgar. But he asks, "Is there no Difference between God's
 "not contradicting vulgar Notions, and confirm-
 "ing them by speaking according to them? Can
 "the God of Truth need Error to support his
 "Truth? p. 208." But I deny that to speak according to vulgar Notions in such a Case, is to confirm them. He that speaks in an historical or moral Discourse of the Sun's Motion, which is an Instance the Author mentions to shew that the Scripture is contrary to the Nature of things, neither confirms nor confutes the vulgar Notion; and indeed does not meddle with it at all, but only uses a way of speaking that is common, and to use any other in such a Case under pretence of speaking with more of a philosophical Exactness, wou'd be a ridiculous Affectation; it wou'd be only to set the Vulgar a staring, and to turn them from the Point in View to things that did not concern them, and of which they were not proper Judges. It is not fit that a Revelation shou'd enter into philosophical Con-

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troverfies,

Nieuventyl's Religious Philosopher, Vol. 3d. Contemplat. 29. Sect. 5. & seq. The other Instance this Author produces is, that our Saviour and *St. Paul* suppose that the Grain of Corn must die in the Ground before it fructifies, *John* 12. 24. *1 Cor.* 15. 36. and so it must. The Body or outward Part of the Grain must be corrupted and dissolv'd in the Ground (and this is all that is to be understood by its dying) or it will not rise and yield Fruit. And the Propriety and Beauty of the Comparison, as used by our Saviour and *St. Paul*, might be easily shewn. And if this Writer had not a strange Desire to find fault with the Scripture, he wou'd never have produc'd this Instance, as he there does, as alone sufficient to invalidate the Authority of the Whole.

troverfies, except the Design of it were to fet Men right in thefe, which it was never intended to do. The Author further asks, “ Is there no Difference “ between God’s not amending Men’s Logick and “ Rhetorick where it is defective, and uſing ſuch “ himſelf?” Here he ſuppoſes that a Revelation ought to have the moſt perfect Degree of Logick and Rhetorick. But how will he prove this to be neceſſary or proper in a Revelation deſign’d for the Uſe of the Vulgar? I am perſuaded the Scripture is much more uſeful, and far better fitted to answer the Deſign, than if it had been written in a Method which ſome wou’d think more ſtrictly logical and artificial. Beſides, if God makes uſe of Men at all as his Inſtruments in conveying a Revelation to Mankind, may he not be ſuppos’d in many Caſes to leave the Writers pretty much to their own Manner of Expreſſion, only taking care to guide them infallibly, ſo as to keep them from Error in what they deliver as his Will?

No inconfiderable Part of the Author’s Book is taken up in inveighing againſt the Superſtitions, the Follies and Corruptions that have been introduc’d among thoſe that have profefs’d the Chriſtian Name; he thinks he has *ſhewn ſome Reſolution in daring to attack the darling Weakneſſes and Follies of falſe Chriſtians*, p. 423. And if he had done this with a View to recover Men to the true Spirit of Chriſtianity, and to the original Purity and Simplicity of the Goſpel of Jeſus, he might have done ſervice to Religion and Mankind, and we ſhou’d not have grudg’d him ſome of thoſe Encomiums he ſo liberally beſtows upon himſelf; but nothing can be more diſingenuous, than to argue from the corrupt Alterations and Additions that have been made to the Chriſtian Religion againſt the original Revelation it ſelf, as contain’d in the Holy Scriptures, as if it were accountable for all the Abuſes that have been made

made of it; which yet is his evident Design. The same way of arguing wou'd equally hold for discarding all Religion and Worship of the Deity. This Gentleman thinks fit to observe, that *those Animals whom we despise for want of Religion*, yet are happier than Mankind, and excel them in a social Conduct, p. 165. And if this wou'd prove that Men had better be without Religion, it wou'd equally shew they had better be without Reason too, and without Liberty; for I don't know any thing that has been more perverted and abus'd.

Another Piece of Management familiar to this Author and others of our modern Deists, is this; if they can but meet with an incautious Passage in any Christian Writer, this is immediately turn'd to the Disadvantage of the common Cause, and perhaps is improv'd into a general Consent, and represented as the common Sentiment of the whole Christian Church. I shall mention one Instance of it which now occurs to me, and which I have not taken notice of in the following Answer. In p. 225. he quotes a rash Passage out of one of *Origen's Homilies*, in which he speaks in a very degrading Manner of the Law of *Moses* taken in the literal Sense, and in the common Acceptation of the Words, as if it were not so reasonable as the Laws of other Nations. And he thinks fit to introduce it thus, that *Origen, by virtue of his allegorical Method, was esteem'd the greatest Champion of Christianity next to the Apostles; and since what he says was not only his own Sense, but the Sense of the Christian Church, it will not be improper to cite him.* Can any thing be more unfair? Must all *Origen's Reveries* (and no Man in that Age had more) pass for the Sense of the universal Church, and all because he writ an Apology for Christianity? Every body knows indeed that *Origen* was very fond of Allegory, (though he himself owns, that the Generality of Christians understood

understood the Scriptures in the literal Sense and common Meaning of the Words*) but it was not by virtue of his allegorick Method that he prov'd an able Champion for Christianity. In his celebrated Work against *Celsus*, he meddles but little with Allegories, and defends the literal Sense of the Doctrines and Facts of the Gospel in a solid manner. And if we must judge of his Sense from that Apology, which was the maturest and best consider'd of all his Works, he there frequently gives the most advantageous Account of *Moses* and his Law; and mentioning some of its Constitutions even literally taken, praises them as manifesting an admirable Wisdom, far superior to the Laws of other Nations; see *Origen contra Celsum*, lib. 5. p. 259, 260. Though it will be easily own'd, that many things in *Moses's* Law had a further Reference, as Types and Prefigurations of good things to come; and to consider them in this Light, gives us a still more comprehensive View of the Wisdom of the divine Author.

It is an usual Artifice with this Writer, when he has a mind to expose a thing, to call it by a hard Name, and represent it under a disagreeable Idea, and then he argues against it as under that Idea. Thus the whole Strength of what he says against positive Precepts, which makes a considerable Part of his Book, arises only from the Idea of *Arbitrary* which he is pleas'd to affix to those Precepts, and by *Arbitrary*, he means things for which there is no Reason at all. As if positive Precepts and unreasonable ones were the same thing, which is fairly to beg the very Point in question, since he cannot but know, that those that maintain that there are positive Precepts do also maintain that there were good Reasons for injoining them. On this Foundation

* See Bp. of St. David's Vindication of our Saviour's Miracles, Part I. p. 100.

dation it is, that he pretends, that those that think God can act arbitrarily, or give arbitrary Commands, can have no Certainty that he will keep his Word, or do as he says; since if he acts arbitrarily in one Instance, he may do so in all; and yet without being assur'd of this, no Revelation can be relied on, nor consequently be of any Use. This is the Course of his Reasoning, p. 246. and elsewhere. And if by acting arbitrarily were meant acting unreasonably and unjustly, it may be said that if God can act unjustly, or if he can at his own Pleasure lye and deceive in one Instance, he can do so in more, and we can never depend upon any thing he says or does: But if by God's acting arbitrarily and giving arbitrary Commands, he means only giving positive Precepts, or injoining things which tho' abstractly and in general they are indifferent, yet as things are circumstanc'd he has wise Reasons for injoining, and which consider'd and used as he requires them, are subservient to the Practice of things in themselves Good and Excellent, and may answer several valuable Purposes, which is the true Notion of positive Precepts; I see no manner of Connection between these two Ideas, God's instituting positive Precepts, and his not keeping his Word, or why it shou'd be concluded, that if he can do the one, he can do the other too.

As another Instance of this Kind I might observe, that in his 12th Chapter he makes a long Declamation against implicit Faith, and against a renouncing or giving up our Reason. This looks plausible, for implicit Faith, and the giving up our Reason has a bad Sound. But when we examine what he means by implicit Faith, it is not merely a depending blindly upon Authority, without examining into the Grounds of that Authority, or a believing absolute Impossibilities and Contradictions upon any pretended Authority whatsoever: But he
represents

represents all believing upon any Authority at all, let the Authority be never so well founded, under that disagreeable Idea, and argues against it under that Notion. And yet by the universal Consent of all Nations, Authority or Testimony is in many Cases a good Reason for believing a thing, and in some Cases is the only Proof the thing admits of.

I think there can scarce be a more manifest Proof of the Prejudice and Partiality of this Author than that, tho' he will not allow that any external Revelation from God can be of any Use at all, yet he frequently professes his high Esteem and Admiration for the Philosophers, and thinks their Writings may be of signal Use. When he is speaking of the first Publishers of the Christian Revelation, he acts the Part of a rigid Censurer, and seems industrious to seek for Faults; but when he has occasion to mention any thing blame-worthy in the Conduct of the Philosophers, such as their mean countenancing the Superstition of their Country, then he is all Tenderness and Candor. It was *prudent* in them *to use some softning Expressions*; and the only Reflection that ought to be made upon it is, *how absurd it is to argue from what even the best of Men say, when it is not safe to talk otherwise*. Instead of finding fault with 'em, we ought rather to own that we are *infinitely oblig'd to 'em for writing so freely as they have done, considering the Disadvantages they were under*: see p. 396, 397. Let us allow this Gentleman to make what Excuses he pleases in favour of the Philosophers; but there is one important Reflection that here naturally offers it self, and that is, how unfit those Philosophers were to reform Mankind who wou'd run no hazard to do it, who from a mean Cowardice, and for fear of exposing themselves to any Inconvenience, instead of declaring openly against that Superstition and Idolatry, which according to the Author they despised in their Hearts, not only complied

complied with it themselves, but advis'd others to do so too! And if, as he expresses it, we are infinitely oblig'd to the Philosophers for writing so freely as they have done under such Disadvantages, how much more are we oblig'd to the Apostles and first Preachers of Christianity, who at the hazard of their Lives, and all that is dear to Men, and in opposition to the greatest Dangers and Difficulties, undertook the glorious Work of rescuing Mankind from the inveterate Superstition and Idolatry in which they had been so long involv'd, and from their amazing Corruption and Dissoluteness of Manners, to the right Knowledge and Worship of the only true God, and to the Practice of universal Purity and Righteousness?

I am sensible that those of our Author's Complexion, will impute that divine Fortitude, that Contempt of the World, and of Death it self, which was so eminent in the Apostles and primitive Christians, to a Spirit of Enthusiasm; and they may, if they please, honour all the noble Emotions of Spirit that have produc'd the most wonderful Actions with that Name: but the bestowing this Name upon them, will not hinder them from deserving our Admiration, especially when we consider the Principles from which they flow'd, an ardent Zeal for the Glory of God, and a hearty Benevolence towards Mankind. And to a Mind that judges equally and impartially of true Merit, and is not carried away with a false Blaze of Glory, they will appear to have far better deserv'd the Character of *Benefactors to Mankind*, than those *Heroes* form'd by the Education under the Philosophers, whom he honours with that glorious Title, and of whom he speaks with Rapture, as Men whom, as a noble Author expresses it, *we are scarce worthy to mention, and cannot without the like manner of Institution hope to imitate;* p. 168.

Indeed

Indeed as far as appears, our modern pretended Patrons of natural Religion, and declar'd Enemies of all Superstition, wou'd be well enough pleas'd to see the old *Pagan* Superstitions restor'd, provided Christianity were abolish'd. Our Author represents from *Plutarch the Religion of the Heathen Church*, (as he calls it) *as full of Satisfaction, Hope, Joy, and Delight*, p. 77. He often mentions *the universal Liberty that was allow'd among the Ancients*; that (as a noble Writer has it) *Matters were then so ballanc'd, that Reason had fair play; Learning and Science flourish'd; wonderful was the Harmony and Temper that arose from these Contrarities*, p. 101. But I cannot well reconcile these magnificent Accounts of the Liberty that flourish'd among the Ancients, with the Excuse he makes for the Philosophers, that if they seem'd to countenance the Superstitions of their Country, it was because *it was not safe to talk otherwise*; that they were oblig'd to use *softening Expressions*; and that therefore they *writ under great Disadvantages*.

These Gentlemen seem to me to have form'd a romantick Idea of the Virtue and Felicity of ancient *Greece* and *Rome*, little agreeable to Fact or History. What *Greece* was in the eldest Times *Thucydides* informs us, when Theft and Rapine was counted honourable and glorious; and afterwards in the politer Ages of *Greece*, when Arts and Eloquence flourish'd, if we judge of them even by the Accounts given by their own Historians, we shall have a very indifferent Opinion of their Virtue. They had indeed some great Men amongst them, who were generally ill us'd; and how much there was of a philosophical Liberty allow'd even in *Athens*, the most learned and polite of the *Grecian* Republicks, *Socrates* is an Instance. As to the *Romans*, if we consider them in the more polite and splendid Times of the Republick, when Arts and Learning flourish'd amongst

amongst them, we shall find that the Age that produc'd a *Cato*, a *Cicero*, and a *Brutus*, when Philosophy was at its height in *Rome*, was corrupt and dissolute to a degree that can scarce be imagin'd. Or if we ascend to the elder Times of the Republick, their History is little else than a constant Succession of Wars abroad for extending their Dominion and Conquests, and perpetual Struggles and Contentions at home. The Patricians and great Men that compos'd the Senate, those fierce and zealous Republicans that make so glorious a Figure in History, were ever for oppressing the poor Plebeians. The Body of the People in those celebrated happy Times were rude and ignorant to a great degree, sunk in an Idolatry and Superstition, than which nothing cou'd be more gross and stupid; and if they were generally free from those Vices that Effeminacy and Luxury are apt to introduce, it is not to be wonder'd at, since they were for a long time poor, and exercis'd with continual Wars. Their Virtue was rough and savage; they made Glory consist chiefly in military Bravery; their very Diversions breath'd a Fierceness scarce consistent with Humanity; how barbarous were their publick Sports, feasting their Eyes in shedding human Blood? What were all their Triumphs but an inhuman insulting over those who were so unhappy as to fall Victims to their Pride and Ambition and Lust of Power? Their admir'd Patriotism and Love to their Country was for the most part only a strong Passion for what they call'd their Country's Glory, that is, for rendering it the Mistress of all others, and the only one to which other States shou'd pay Homage. And this Passion the stronger it was, the more mischievous it rendered them to their Neighbours. Impatient as they were of any Tyrant at home, they themselves were for lording it over all others, jealous of any that did but preserve themselves in a State of Liberty

and Independency upon them, which they were too proud and haughty to endure long. Notwithstanding all the glorious Representations these Gentlemen delight to make of the Virtue and Felicity of those Times, our own are far happier, if we be but duly sensible of our Happiness. We enjoy more of the Sweets of a just and extensive Liberty; nor need we go out of the History of these Nations for Instances of true Patriotism, equal to any in *Greece* and *Rome*. And as the Christian Virtue is of the noblest Nature, comprehending Piety towards God free from Superstition and Idolatry; an extensive Benevolence towards Mankind, and an universal Purity of Heart and Life; so I doubt not that even in our present Corruption, which this Writer so much exaggerates, there are many Instances of a pure and sublime Virtue in its just Extent, far transcending what was to be found in ancient Pagan *Rome*, even in its happiest Times: Besides that the Body of the People are incomparably more knowing, and have far juster Notions of God and of their Duty, and of whatsoever is of the greatest Importance to Mankind to know.

The same Reflections may be applied to other Instances produc'd by the Author. He represents *the Infidels of China* (as he expresses it) as *having the Preference to Christians in relation to all moral Virtues*, p. 404, 405. and tells us from Mr. *Leibnitz*, that "such is our growing Corruption, that
" it may almost seem necessary to send some *Chinese*
" *Missionaries* to teach us the Use and Practice of natural Theology; as we send *Missionaries*
" to them to teach them reveal'd Religion." But certainly we need not be sent to the Writings of *Confucius* to learn Morals, which we may much better learn from the Gospel, and which are there inforc'd with far greater Authority, and urg'd with infinitely stronger Motives. Shall the Literati in
China,

China, many of whom deny a Providence and a future State, be sent to instruct us in natural Theology? Or those who worship Idols be sent to teach us the true Worship of the Deity? Nor need we their Instructions as to the Duties and Offices of the civil and social Life. For not to mention the inhuman Practice so prevalent among them, of exposing and destroying their Infants, I think all Authors are agreed that there is not a Nation upon the Face of the Earth more addicted to cheating and defrauding, or that have a less Regard to Truth and Honesty in their Dealings than they have. And whatever is said of their brotherly Affection and Benevolence, Prejudice it self must own, that it is impossible to carry this to a greater height than the Gospel does; and that universal Love and Charity, even towards our Enemies themselves, is there recommended and inforc'd in the strongest and most engaging Manner. We need not therefore any Missionaries from *China* to teach us Morals. The most effectual Remedy against our growing Corruption, wou'd be to procure a greater Veneration for the holy Scriptures, to strengthen Men's Belief and promote the Knowledge and Study of them, and to engage Men to pay a greater Regard to the excellent Laws and Doctrines of the Gospel. And I cannot but think those Gentlemen very ill employ'd, who whilst they complain of the great Corruption of the Age, do all they can to destroy the Authority of the Christian Revelation; which, where it is heartily believ'd and submitted to, is the most effectual Remedy against it.

I shall take this Occasion to make a brief Representation of the admirable Tendency there is in the holy Scriptures to promote the Practice of pure and refin'd Morality in its just Extent, which may both justly recommend those sacred Writings to our Esteem, and let us see the Obligations we are under

to those who take so much pains to vilify and expose them.

Any one that impartially considers and compares the Old and New Testament, will find one uniform Design carried on thro' the Whole; which is to engage Men to the Love, the Service and Adoration of the Deity, and the Practice of universal Righteousness, to deter them from Vice and Wickedness and Idolatry; in a word, to recover the human Nature to true and solid Happiness.

This Author gives a Definition of true Religion or religious Truth, that "it must consist in the Agreement of our Ideas with those things which are the Subjects of our religious Inquiry, *viz.* the Nature of God and Man; and false Religion must consist in having Ideas that are not agreeable to, or do not truly represent those Subjects, p. 68." This Character of religious Truth agrees admirably well with the holy Scriptures. If we consider the Idea of God given us in the Old Testament and in the New, nothing can have a greater Tendency to form our Minds to becoming Affections and Dispositions towards him. We have there the most glorious and lively Descriptions of his Almighty Power, his immense Greatness, his unsearchable Wisdom, and especially his boundless Goodness and Love. His Providence is there every where represented as most wisely and powerfully governing all Events, the Affairs of Nations, and particular Persons. His Ways are represented as sometimes dark and mysterious, but always most wise and righteous; his Dominion and Sovereignty as absolute and unlimited, and yet as ever proceeding by the steady Rules of infinite Wisdom, Goodness and Righteousness. In his Idea, as represented in Scripture, are united the most exalted Majesty and Dignity, and the most marvellous Grace and Condescension; his Goodness as there describ'd is not a weak soft Indulgence, which

which will not suffer him to vindicate the Authority of his Laws, (which is the Notion our Author seems to entertain of it, but which is a Character unbecoming the wise Governor of the World) but a most just Goodness, directed in all its Effects by infinite Wisdom, and in a perfect Conjunction with infinite Purity; shewing Mercy to penitent returning Sinners, without giving any Encouragement to the Obstinate and Presumptuous. The Method of our Redemption makes such a Display of the divine Excellencies in their Harmony, especially his impartial Justice and his incomprehensible Grace and Mercy, as represents him at once most amiable and venerable.

If we proceed from the Idea of God to that of Man, as represented in those holy Writings, this is not less remarkable. The original Dignity of the human Nature is there asserted, and its present Corruption and Degeneracy (which is too sadly confirm'd by Experience and Observation) describ'd in the most affecting Manner. Man is made sensible of his Miseries, his Wants and Diseases, the Fruits of his Apostacy from God, not to drive him into Despair, but to make him solicitous for a Cure; and this he is directed to look for, not merely in himself, but in God the kind Parent of his Being; he has destroy'd himself, but in God is his Help and his Salvation.

If we consider the moral Precepts both in the New Testament and in the Old, they are unquestionably pure and excellent. Our Duty is there set before us in its just Extent, with respect to God, our Neighbours, and our selves. With respect to God, a pure Adoration of the Deity is every where prescrib'd; an ardent Love to God and thankful Admiration of his infinite Goodness; a steady Affiance in his Grace and Mercy, join'd with a profound Veneration of his Holiness and Justice; an intire Resignation to his Will, a constant Dependence on his Providence.

vidence. We are requir'd to pray to him for all the Mercies we stand in need of, and to bless him for all the Benefits we enjoy; and to observe the Rites he himself hath appointed, which in the New Testament are few and simple, and though in the Old they were more various and difficult of Observation, besides that they were wisely fitted for the Time then present, great Care is there taken to instruct the People, that these wou'd be of no avail to recommend them to the Favour of God, without the Practice of universal Righteousness.

With respect to the Duties we owe to our Fellow-Creatures, all Injustice and Oppression, Fraud and Unrighteousness, all Hatred, Malice and Revenge is forbidden in the strongest Manner both in the Old Testament and the New; the Exercise of Justice and Righteousness and Fidelity, of mutual Benevolence and Kindness and Charity, is there recommended and inforc'd in the strongest Manner, but especially in the Gospel of Jesus, which undeniably breathes universal Love and Benevolence in every Part of it, and this in its utmost Extent, as reaching to the whole human Race; not excepting our Enemies themselves, and those that have injur'd us.

With respect to our selves, it every where prescribes an universal Purity, Chastity, and Temperance; it teaches us to govern our Affections, and to raise them to the things that are above. It is not merely an outward Sobriety and Regularity of Deportment that is requir'd in the Old Testament and in the New, but an inward Purity and Sanctity of Soul. But tho' the Morality of the Scripture is so pure and sublime, and of so great an Extent, yet this is without running into any wild and extravagant Excesses, unsuited to the Condition of the human Nature. We are there taught to govern and subdue our corrupt Appetites and Passions, but not

to eradicate them, according to the vain-glorious Rant of the *Stoicks*. It does not, under pretence of an extraordinary Purity, forbid and condemn innocent Enjoyments. The Mortification requir'd in the Old Testament and in the New is not cruelly to wound and macerate our Bodies, but to mortify our Pride and Sensuality, and our beloved Lusts. It is a mild, a humane and sociable Virtue that it prescribes, not unreasonably austere. The Fortitude it requires is a Firmness of Soul rais'd above all the Terrors of this World, yet not a rigid Apathy, insensible to Pain or the Movements of Pity, but tender, human, and compassionate. Our Author, p. 89. finds fault with some of the primitive Christians for their Forwardness in offering themselves to Suffering and Death, (a glorious Fault, which in others probably wou'd have been admir'd) but the Gospel which admirably guards against all Extremes, is not chargeable with this. A prudent Circumspection in avoiding Dangers is there not only allow'd, but prescrib'd, *Mat.* 10. 16, 22. We are not to seek Death, tho' not to fear it in a good Cause.

But what deserves special Notice with respect to the Morals requir'd in the Gospel, is, that at the same time, that it requires such an eminent Purity and universal Righteousness, it tends to promote an amiable Humility. The Virtue it requires is not vain-glorious, proud and assuming. How different is the Idea and Character of a good Man form'd upon the Model of the Scriptures from the wise Man of the *Stoicks*, setting up for a kind of Divinity and Self-sufficiency in himself! We are taught in the Scriptures, to aspire to the highest Degree of Purity, and yet when we have done all, to disclaim all Confidence in ourselves; to abound in good Works, but not to glory in them; to use our utmost Diligence, and yet place our Dependance on God for his divine Assistances, and ascribe to him the Praise of every

good thing that is in us. The Christian Virtue refers all to God, as the glorious Fountain and Author of all Good, to him ever directs its Views, lives in a constant Dependance on him, and subsists by Communications from him. It lives to him here, and looks for the immediate Vision and eternal Enjoyment of him in a future State. What a perfect finish'd Character, what a lovely Form of Goodness is this?

Those sacred Writings not only set our Duty before us in its just Extent, but abound with the most excellent Motives and Arguments to engage us to the Practice of it. Nothing can possibly be more moving and pathetical, than the Exhortations that are there made in the Name of God himself. He is there represented as expostulating with Sinners concerning their Folly and Disobedience; as commanding with the Authority of a God, beseeching them with the Tenderness of a Father; the most awful Threatnings are denounc'd on the one hand, the most inviting Promises are made on the other. Sin is represented in all its Malignity and Demerit, and God's Displeasure against it describ'd in such a manner, as is most apt to strike Sinners with a Dread of his Justice; and at the same time, all possible Encouragement is given to penitent returning Sinners. They are not merely left to their own uncertain Conjectures, but they have the strongest Assurances given them in the Name of God himself, that if they repent and turn from their evil Ways, he will forgive their Iniquities, how many and aggravated soever, and will confer the most glorious Benefits upon them. To excite and animate us in the Practice of our Duty, the most perfect and lovely Pattern of universal Goodness and Righteousness is exhibited to our View in the Example of the Son of God himself in our Nature; our Duty is urg'd upon us by all the happy Constraints of Love and Gratitude; good Men
are

are represented as invested with the most glorious Privileges; the Influences and Aids of the divine Spirit are promised; and finally the Gospel contains the most express Promises of the glorious Reward of eternal Life, with which God will in his rich Grace and Goodness crown our sincere persevering Obedience.

Our Author indeed, by a strange way of Reasoning, endeavours to turn this to the Disadvantage of the Gospel-Revelation. He observes, that “ if Men
“ are apt to embrace any Religion (the *Mahometan*
“ for Instance) which flatters their Hopes of future
“ Felicity, and makes them loth to discover the
“ pleasing Illusion, does it not follow that the more
“ any Religion does so, the more Cause Men have
“ critically to examine into it's Reasonableness,
“ p. 220.” As if the promising eternal Life as the Reward of Virtue and Goodness were a suspicious Character, and enough to make us doubt whether a Revelation came from God. Indeed if the Happiness it propos'd were like a *Mahometan* Paradise, low, base, and sensual, consisting in the Gratification of the fleshly Appetites, this might administer just Cause of Suspicion. But the Idea the Gospel gives us of that future Felicity, is the noblest that can be conceiv'd. It represents it as a State of consummate Purity, consisting in the eternal Enjoyment of God himself, and in a perfect Conformity to him. And to propose such a pure and sublime Happiness as this, and to assure us by an express Promise from God himself that this shall be the glorious Reward of our sincere, tho' imperfect Obedience, is a signal Advantage to the Cause of Virtue in the World, and one of the noblest Purposes for which we cou'd suppose a Revelation given. And to take away this, wou'd be to deprive Virtue of its strongest Encouragements and Supports, and to rob good Men of that which is the most glorious Source of their Consolation, and

the most effectual Support against all the Evils and Sufferings to which they are now expos'd.

The Gospel also denounces the most awful Punishment against those that persist in an impenitent presumptuous Course of Sin and Disobedience, and this is no less necessary in a Revelation given from God than the Promises made to the Righteous. There are many that are wholly immers'd in Vice and Sensuality; it is in vain to talk to such of the Beauty of Virtue; they are insensible of its Charms, and have no Taste for its pure and refined Pleasures. The Voice of Reason is not heard amidst the Tumult of the Passions, and headstrong Appetites. To such obstinate Sinners, Hell is opened, and the dreadful Threatnings of eternal Misery are thundered in their Ears, not to drive them to Despair, but to deter them from their evil Courses. And nothing can have a more apt Tendency to awaken them to a serious Consideration of their Guilt and Danger; and such a Consideration is often the first Step to Repentance and Amendment, and prepares the Way for better Impressions.

I think it appears upon this brief Representation, that supposing a divine Revelation really given to Mankind, it cou'd scarce be expected to exhibit a more lovely and perfect Form of Goodness, more pure and excellent Precepts, or Doctrines that have a happier Tendency to form us to the most noble and excellent Dispositions; nor cou'd it be suppos'd to set before us more powerful Motives to engage us to universal Righteousness, or to deter us from the Practice of Vice and Wickedness; so that we may safely pronounce it worthy of God: and if it contains some Doctrines of a sublime and mysterious Nature, (and such things there are even in natural Religion it self) this is what may be justly expected in a Revelation design'd amongst other things to inform us of the Nature, and the wonderful Councils
of

of the Deity, Things very remote from our Apprehension. And yet there is no Doctrine taught in the Scriptures that is design'd merely to entertain and amuse us, but to excite good Affections in us, and to have a noble Influence on the Practice.

And shall we then regard those as Friends and Benefactors to Mankind, who labour with so much Art and Industry to subvert the Authority of such a Religion as this, so pure and excellent in its Nature and Tendency? It is hard to conceive what real Benefit or Advantage to Mankind such Persons can propose by their Attempt. Do they propose to advance the Cause of Virtue by taking away its strongest Encouragements and Supports, or to reclaim the World from Vice by removing the Restraints Christianity lays upon it? Do they propose to render the Lives of good Men more comfortable and happy? Or to give 'em greater Assurances of the divine Favour and Acceptance than the Gospel does, or raise 'em to more lively Hopes of a glorious Immortality? Far from this, they endeavour to ravish from them that which is the chief Comfort and Satisfaction of their Lives, and leave them to endless perplexing Uncertainties. Or do they propose by abolishing Christianity to deliver Men from vain and needless Terrors? But whom do they propose to deliver from their Fears? Not the truly penitent and sincere, for the Gospel speaks no Terror to such; it makes the most effectual Provision for their Comfort, assuring them of the Favour of God, of the Assistances of his Spirit, and of the most glorious eternal Rewards.

They can only therefore propose to free the vicious Part of Mankind, those that persist in an obstinate Course of Wickedness, from the Terrors they are under of a future Punishment. The Gospel does indeed denounce the most awful Threatenings against such Persons. And is it not highly proper and use-

ful

ful that such shou'd be in Terror? And he that shou'd attempt to set them free from those Fears, wou'd be far from doing Service to Mankind, or to the Cause of Virtue in the World. Yet this seems to be the Design these Gentlemen have in view. As they endeavour to destroy reveal'd Religion, and reduce all to the Religion of Nature, so the next Step is to give such an Account of natural Religion, and to reduce it to such Principles as may banish all Fears of future Punishment, and the just Judgments of God for their Crimes. And it must be own'd, this Writer, after all his glorious Pretences, has made large Advances this way, and his Principles (as he manages them) will go a great way to make the Wicked easy in their Vices, and free their Minds from the Terrors that hang about them. I cannot therefore but look upon his Scheme, taking it all together, to have as bad an Aspect on the Interests of natural Religion as reveal'd.

I shall only make one Observation more on the Spirit and Design of the Author's Book, and which may further let us see what Obligations we are under to him for his Attempt; and that is, that many Passages of his Book seem plainly calculated to promote the Popish Cause. He insinuates, that *there is no Medium between Popery and natural Religion*; so that if we be Christians, we must be Papists. He represents the Protestants as a strange inconsistent kind of People, and the Papists as the only consistent Christians. He puts Popery and Christianity on the same foot, as if the Arguments brought in proof of the one wou'd equally favour the other. How just these Reflections are, I shall have occasion to shew, when I come to consider those Passages of the Author's Book; at present I shall only observe, that whatever his Design might be, he cou'd not more effectually serve the Interests of Popery than by such Insinuations.

I shall conclude this Introduction with observing, that though it cannot but fill every true Christian with a deep Concern, to see such open Attempts against the Honour of our blessed Lord and our holy Religion, yet some Advantages may be drawn even from the Malice and Virulence of our Adversaries.

One Effect of it I hope will be, to put professed Christians upon more seriously considering and weighing the Nature and Excellency of the Christian Religion, and the solid and glorious Evidences whereby it stands confirm'd; the Consequence of which will be, that Christianity will be both better understood and more firmly believ'd; and those that profess it will have their Faith fix'd on a more solid Foundation than mere Education, Custom, and such other Grounds, which will equally serve a false Religion as the true.

Another Use that shou'd be made of these Attempts against Christianity shou'd be to make Christians, especially Divines, more cautious, when they consider that there is a watchful Enemy ready to take advantage of every rash unguarded Expression or Concession, and turn it to the prejudice of the common Cause. Any one that is acquainted with the Writings of our modern Deists, knows that a great Part of the Strength of their Books consists in Citations drawn from the Writings of Christian Divines; tho' it must be own'd, that there is often a great deal of Art used to misrepresent and pervert their Sense.

It shou'd also ingage us to put a higher Value on the Christian Religion consider'd in its primitive Purity, as laid down in the Gospel, to consider that the most plausible Objections urg'd by our Author and others his Fellow-labourers in the same Cause, are drawn from the Additions that have been made to it, and the Corruptions that have been introduc'd in After-ages; and that he has been able to say very little against Christianity it self as deliver'd by Christ
and

and his Apostles, though we may be sure he wanted no Inclination to do so.

Finally, when we observe what Advantages the Enemies of Christianity take from the Corruption of Morals among professed Christians, as well as from their Disputes and Contentions, and especially that Spirit of Bitterness that has too often carried them to revile and persecute one another; this ought to ingage all those that have the Interests of our holy Religion at heart, to study to adorn it by a holy exemplary Conversation, and to lay aside their Disputes and Animosities about lesser Matters, or at least to manage them without bitterness, that they may not bring Disgrace on the most excellent, and the most kind and benevolent Institution in the World.

Fas est & ab hoste doceri.

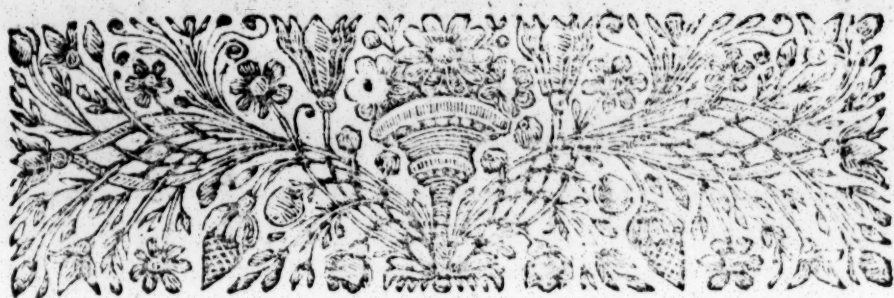
Thus we ought to learn even from our Enemies, and turn their malicious Attempts to our own Advantage; and then it is to be hoped that the Issue of these desperate Attempts against Christianity will only be the strengthening and promoting the Interests of that Religion they are designed to subvert.



ERRATA.

Vol. I. p. 100, line 22, for *hardness* read *blindness*. p. 117, l. 2, for *principles* r. *prejudices*. p. 158, l. 2, dele *no*. p. 203, l. 17, for *it* r. *they*. A N

Vol. II. p. 61, l. 27, for *events* r. *efforts*. p. 82, l. 22, for *it* r. *is*. p. 93, l. 28, after *proof* r. *of*. p. 243, l. 14, for *Eph.* 14. r. *Eph.* 4. p. 291, l. 5, for *render* r. *order*. p. 308, l. pen. for *swear'est* r. *swarest*. p. 353, l. 2, for *jungement* r. *judgment*.



A N
A N S W E R
T O A L A T E
B O O K,
I N T I T U L E D,

Christianity as Old as the Creation.

C H A P. I.

*A General Account of the Scheme of the Author
of Christianity as old as the Creation, and the
various Senses in which he takes the Law of
Nature.*

THE Author of Christianity as old as the
Creation sets out very gloriously. He
thinks, “ he has laid down such plain and
“ evident Rules as may enable Men of the
“ meanest Capacity to distinguish between Religion
“ and Superstition, and has represented the Former in
“ every part, so beautiful, so amiable, and so strong-
Vol. I. B “ly

“ ly affecting, that they who in the least reflect,
 “ must be highly in love with it; and easily per-
 “ ceive that their Duty and Happiness are insepa-
 “ rable.” See his Preface. He thinks he *deserves*
to be heard, whilst he endeavours to defend the *Li-*
berty given by God to Mankind, and to *attack the*
darling Weaknesses and Follies of false Christians.

The Method he proposes for this is to shew that
Christianity is as old as the Creation, or that the
Gospel is a Republication of the Law of Nature. One
 wou’d be apt to judge from this, that the Design
 of his Book must be to shew, how agreeable the
 Gospel is to the Law of Nature; that it explains the
 great Principles and inforces the Duties of that Law,
 and clearly publishes it to the World. And if so,
 he who professes so high an Esteem for the Law of
 Nature, ought to have proportionably a very great
 Esteem for Christianity. But this is far from his
 Intention. Instead of endeavouring to shew the A-
 greement there is between the Scripture-Revelation,
 and the Law of Nature, he takes a great deal of pains
 to shew that the one of these is absolutely inconsistent
 with the other. He often talks of *internal* and *ex-*
ternal Revelation, and proposes to shew that *Reli-*
gion, whether internally or externally reveal’d, must be
the same. But this is only to save Appearances; since
 the evident Design of his Book is to prove, that there
 never was nor cou’d be any external Revelation at all
 distinguish’d from the Light of Nature common to
 all Mankind; and that the Pretence or Belief of such
 external Revelation has been the unhappy Source of
 all that Superstition that has produc’d such infinite
 Mischief in the World; and particularly that the Re-
 velation suppos’d to be contain’d in the Scriptures,
 naturally tends to draw Men off from the Purity and
 Simplicity of the Original Law of Nature, and to
 adulterate it with debasing Mixtures: That there-
 fore the best thing that can be done for the Happi-
 ness

ness of Mankind is to engage them to throw off all Revelation at once, and particularly to lay aside the Authority of the Scriptures, as Books which naturally tend to mislead us, and to adhere to the pure simple Dictates of Nature. That he may therefore answer that Design which in great Compassion to a World over-run with Superstition he has undertaken, he sets himself to shew the absolute Perfection, Immutability, and Clearness of the Law of Nature. It is so perfect, that nothing can possibly be added to it by any subsequent Revelation, and to pretend to add to it is to destroy it; and at the same time it is so clear, that it cannot be made clearer to any Man by any external Revelation than it is to all Men without it. These are the two main Pillars of his Scheme, and if either of these fail him, the whole falls. For if the Law of Nature be not absolutely perfect, then something may be added to it; and here there may be room for an external Revelation; and on the other hand, tho' we shou'd suppose it perfect, yet if it be not clear and easily known to all Mankind, here again an external Revelation may come in, and be of signal Use to render it clearer than it wou'd be without it. Our Author is sensible of this, and therefore sets himself, and it is the Design of his Book, to prove both these. But his Scheme is so unhappily chosen, that what he offers to support one Part of it does in effect overturn the other.

In order to prove that the Law of Nature is absolutely perfect, he represents it as comprehending *every Thing that is founded on the Nature and Reason of Things*; that it is the *Rule to God himself*, and to *all rational Beings* throughout the Universe, and wou'd be so to *ten thousand Worlds more if there were so many*; that it takes in all that it is possible for God in any Circumstances to require, and all that the Creatures can in any possible Circumstances be oblig'd to know or do. And if the Law of Nature be taken in this vast comprehensive Sense, it will easily be own'd that it is absolutely perfect, and

nothing can be added to it. For what can be added to that which is suppos'd to comprehend the whole extent of Truth and Duty relating to God and the Creatures in every possible Circumstance? But then it is the easiest thing in the World to prove, that the Law of Nature taken in this vast extensive Sense is not so clear to all Mankind, that they need no Information about it. How can it be said, that no *great Wisdom is requir'd to know the Law of Nature* in this comprehensive View, and *that no well-meaning Gentile cou'd be ignorant of it*, as this Gentleman speaks, p. 398 *? Can any one be perswaded to think, that the whole extent of Things, with all the Relations and Respects they bear to one another, and all the Fitnesses arising from them throughout this vast Universe, relating either to God or the Creatures, lies open to every Man's Understanding, even to those of the *meanest Capacity*, and that are *not able to read in their Mother-tongue*, p. 295 †? Indeed if the Law of Nature takes in all that is founded on the Nature and Reason of Things, then none can fully know it but he that has a full Comprehension of the whole Nature and Extent of Things, which I conceive is peculiar to God himself. And then there may be Things relating to the Law of Nature taken in this extensive Sense, that is, relating to the Nature and Reason or Fitness of Things, which are well known to God, but are not so to us, except he is pleas'd to take some way to discover them to us. So that on this View of the Law of Nature there might be room enough for an external Revelation: It is manifest therefore that this Notion of the Law of Nature can be of no great Service to the Author's main Design.

But there is another Notion of the Law of Nature which this Gentleman frequently insists upon. He seems to take it precisely for that Law which was
given

* P. 361. † P. 267. 8^o.

given to Man in the Beginning at his first Creation; and therefore he calls it *Original Revelation*. But it is manifest that the Law of Nature taken in this Sense is not of the same Extent with the former, nor deserves those magnificent Epithets which this Writer bestows upon it. For how can it be said that the Law given to Man in the Beginning comprehends *every Thing that is founded in the Nature and Reason of Things*; or that this is the Law by which God himself in all Cases is to act; and that it is a Law to all intelligent Beings throughout the Universe, and wou'd be so to *ten thousand Worlds if there were so many*? except it can be prov'd that all other Beings that actually inhabit this vast Universe, or that cou'd possibly exist in any other Worlds, must necessarily be of the same Nature with Man, and in the same Circumstances, and must sustain just the same Relations. All that can be reasonably said concerning this Original Law given to Man at the Beginning is, that since it was founded, as this Gentleman alleges, in the Nature and Fitness of Things, we may be sure it was very well suited to the Condition and Circumstances Man was at first in. But supposing an Alteration in the Circumstances of Mankind from what they were at the Beginning, (and that such an Alteration is possible, must be own'd, except it be said that Man is absolutely immutable) then there may be an Addition to that original Law, or some new Constitution suited to that Alteration in the Condition and Circumstances of Mankind. And on this Supposition also there is room for an external Revelation.

There is another Notion of the Law of Nature advanc'd by this Writer, differing in some respects from either of the former. Having objected to himself, "May not the Law of Nature be very clear, tho' the Light of Nature be so very dim as to have undeniable Defects?" he answers, "Can the

“ Law of Nature be clear, and the Light of Nature
 “ dim, when the Law of Nature is nothing but
 “ what the Light of Nature or Reason dictates?”
 p. 376 *. Where he makes the Law of Nature and
 the Light of Nature to be exactly of the same extent,
 so that what may be affirm’d of the one may be af-
 firm’d of the other too. And by the Light of Na-
 ture he understands the Knowledge all Men have of
 Truth and Duty, meerly by their own Reason in the
 present State of Mankind. To the same purpose
 he defines the *Religion of Nature*, which with him
 is a Term of the same signification with the *Law of
 Nature*, to consist in “ the Sense and Practice of
 “ those Duties, which result from the Knowledge
 “ we by our Reason have of God and his Perfec-
 “ tions, and of our selves and our own Imperfec-
 “ tions, and of the Relation we stand in to him and
 “ to our Fellow-creatures.” p. 13 †. But this is re-
 ally to alter his Scheme: for when he is endeavouring
 to shew, that the Law of Nature is absolutely perfect,
 and nothing can be added to it, he represents it as
 comprehending every thing that is founded in the
 Nature and Reason of Things; and therefore as the
 Law by which God governs his Actions, and by
 which all rational Beings throughout the Universe,
 and in ten thousand Worlds more, if there were so
 many, must govern theirs: But in order to shew,
 that the Law of Nature is clear to all Mankind, he
 wou’d have it to be measur’d not meerly by the Rea-
 son and Fitness of Things, but by the Knowledge
 Men have of that Reason and Fitness; so that though
 we should suppose any Truth or Duty to be founded
 in the Reason and Nature of Things, yet if Men do
 not know it by their own Reason, it is not the Law
 of Nature. Yea, he seems often to express him-
 self, as if by the Law of Nature he understood not
 meerly what Men may know by the Use of their
 own

* P. 341. † P. 11. 8^o.

own Reason in their present State, but what all Men actually do know. And accordingly he sets himself to shew, that the Knowledge of the Law of Nature is in fact universal, p. 379. 380 *. But then it is manifest, that if we take the Law of Nature in this Sense, it is far from deserving the glorious Epithets he bestows upon it. For is the Knowledge all Men have of Truth and Duty, or of the Reason and Fitness of Things, so absolutely perfect, that nothing can be added to it? In this Sense it may justly be affirm'd, and shall afterwards be proved, that the Law or Light of Nature, in the present State of Mankind, taking them as they now are, is very imperfect and defective; and an additional external Revelation may be of great Use, to give Men a clearer Knowledge of many Things which they do not know, or not so certainly by the meer Light of their own unassisted Reason.

Thus it appears, that after all the Stir this Gentleman makes about the Law of Nature, as the only Rule for Mankind to govern themselves by, he seems not to have fix'd his Scheme, or to know precisely himself, or at least to let his Readers know what he intends by it. He takes the Law of Nature in very different Senses, and yet every where applies the same glorious Epithets to it, of absolute Perfection, Immutability, Eternity, Clearness, &c. He affirms Things of that Law in one of these Senses, which are only true of it in another; and this spreads an artful Confusion through his whole Book. But though, according to the different Acceptations of the Law of Nature, it will appear in very different Views, yet I cannot see that, taken in any of these Senses, it will answer the Author's Design; which is to shew, that there is no need at all, nor can be any Use for an external Revelation. For if the Law of Nature be taken in the most general comprehen-

five Sense, as comprehending every thing founded in the Reason and Nature of Things, every thing that it is fit for God himself to do or to require, or for the Creatures to perform, in any suppos'd Circumstance or State of Things; I grant, that no Revelation, if true, can contain any thing but what is comprehended in that Law, and may be reduc'd to it; but then I say, that there may be many Things that belong to that Law taken in this vast Extent, that is, there may be many Things fit for God to do or to require, which we could not pretend certainly to know, without an extraordinary Revelation. But if the Law of Nature be taken precisely for the Law given to Men at the Beginning, then supposing an Alteration in the Condition and Circumstances of Mankind from what they were in the Beginning, there may be a new Constitution, differing in some respects from that original One, and there may be Things proper to be known and done in relation to it, of which an external Revelation may be highly useful to inform us. Or if the Law of Nature be taken only to signify the Knowledge Men now have by their own Reason, in its present State, of what is fit to be known and done, of God's Methods of dealing with us and of our Duty to him, 'tis evident that in this Sense the Law of Nature is incumbred with much Darkness, and subject to great Defects, and an external Revelation may be of signal Use to clear many Things to us, which in the present depraved State of Mankind we could not have discovered and known at all, or could not have known with any Certainty, if left to our selves without the Assistance of such a Revelation.

There is one Observation more I would make with respect to the Account this Gentleman gives of the Law of Nature; and that is, That though he often talks in very glorious Terms of the absolute Perfection and Immutability of that Law, and seems

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to suppose its Precepts to be of necessary and eternal and unalterable Obligation; yet at other times he plainly supposes, that there are no fixed unalterable Rules of Morality at all; and that all that is to be understood by the Law of Nature is only this general Rule, that every Man must act according as the Circumstances he is under point out his Duty. He tells us indeed, that "God has from the Beginning given all Mankind some Rule or Law for their Conduct," p. 3. and that this Rule or Law is *absolutely perfect, incapable of Addition or Diminution*, *ibid.* But then if we would know what that Rule or Law is, which he supposes God to have given Men for their Conduct, let us consider what he offers, p. 18, 19*. where he observes, that "considering the Variety of Circumstances Men are under, and these continually changing as well as being for the most part unforeseen, 'tis impossible to have Rules laid down by any external Revelation for every particular Case; and therefore there must be some standing Rule, discoverable by the Light of Nature, to direct us in all such Cases." Here he talks of a standing Rule, or Law, to direct us in all Cases whatsoever; and he explains this standing Rule thus, that "we can't but know, if we in the least consider, that whatever Circumstances Men are plac'd in by the universal Cause of all Things, 'tis his eternal and immutable Will, by his placing them in those Circumstances, that they act as these require." And he adds, That "this will direct a Man how to act in all Conditions of Life." And after having told us, p. 345 †. That "it is the Tendency of Actions which makes them either good or bad;" and, That "'tis the Circumstances Men are under, by which we are to judge of the Tendency of Actions;" he adds, p. 349 ‡. That "this is a Rule without Exception; whereas all other general

* P. 16. † P. 312. ‡ P. 317. 8°.

“ neral Rules are of little Use, when applied to particular Cases, because of the many Exceptions to them, founded on Rules equally general.” He calls it therefore an *universal and unexceptionable Rule*, and his *never-failing Rule of judging of Actions by their Tendency*. p. 350*.

By comparing these several Passages it appears, that the only universal Rule, or standing Law, which this Author supposes to be given to all Mankind for their Conduct, is this, That they must act as the Circumstances they are under do require. And since he also tells us, That there is a *great Variety of Circumstances*; and that *those Circumstances are continually changing, as well as for the most part unforeseen*; and again, That *there are numberless Circumstances which attend us, and which perpetually varying, may make the same Actions, according as Men are differently affected by them, good or bad*. p. 27†. I don't see how he can suppose that there are any fixed moral Rules or Precepts at all, that are of unchangeable Obligation; for he tells us, that all such Rules (for of moral Rules or Precepts he is there speaking) have such a multitude of Exceptions, that they are of little Use, when applied to particular Cases. Now this seems not well reconcilable to the Account he at other times gives of the Law of Nature. He often represents it, as if it were a System of Principles and moral Precepts, which are fixed and unalterable, and were so from the Beginning, to which nothing cou'd ever be added, and in which nothing cou'd ever be alter'd; which System or Collection of Principles and Precepts he represents as known to all Mankind; and that any external Revelation can only be a Transcript of that original Law. But here he seems to destroy this Scheme. The only standing Rule that he supposes, is not a System of Principles or moral Laws and Precepts, but only

* P. 318. † P. 23. 89.

only this general Rule, that we must act as the Circumstances we are under point out to be our Duty. And into this general *standing Rule*, as he calls it, he seems to resolve the whole Law of Nature, that Law which he supposes to be absolutely perfect and immutable. So that properly speaking, when he talks of the Immutability of the Law of Nature, he only means that this Rule or Law is immutable (and nothing else) that we must act according to the Circumstances we are in. And as he supposes these Circumstances to be very various, and to be continually changing, as well as for the most part unforeseen, so he must also suppose that our Duties are continually varying, and that there are no fixed unchangeable Rules of Morality at all.

But certainly this *standing Rule* or Law he talks of, when thus generally propos'd, is of no great Use or Service to Mankind. It will not give them much Assistance or Direction to tell them, that they must act in all Cases as the Circumstances they are under do require, and point out to be for their own or the general Good. And if notwithstanding this standing Rule or Law, the Usefulness of which he so much magnifies, it is an Advantage to Mankind, as it evidently is, to have written Laws and the Instructions of Moralists for their better Guidance and Direction in their Duty; I can't see but that this standing Rule will still leave room enough for an external divine Revelation to instruct Mankind, both what Duty God requires of them, and what they are to expect from God, which they might otherwise be often at a loss to know, for want of a full View of the Reasons and Circumstances of Things. And to leave Men, as this Writer seems to do, without any fix'd Rules of Morality at all, and to discard all moral Laws and Precepts as useless, under pretence of the many Exceptions to them, and to leave every Man to do as he thinks best in the Circumstances he
is

is in without any other Direction, is in my Opinion of great disservice to the Law of Nature itself, and to the Cause of Virtue and Morality, for which he professes so great a Zeal.

Upon the whole it is very hard to form a Notion of what this Author understands by the Law of Nature, tho' his Subject shou'd have led him to have treated it distinctly. I shall not at present enter on a particular Consideration of the Law of Nature, which has been sufficiently done by others; my Design being chiefly to consider the Author's own Scheme, and the Notions he advances of that Law, with a View to render an external Revelation useless or impossible.

Something, however, I shall offer briefly and in general concerning the Law of Nature, which may tend to clear our way to a right Understanding of the present Question.

I freely own, and so do the most zealous Advocates for Revelation, that there is a Law of Nature obligatory on Mankind as reasonable Creatures, moral Agents, and which wou'd have oblig'd them tho' there had never been any extraordinary Revelation, or written Law at all; so that in this Case, they cou'd not be said to be without a Law, or without a Religion; or in other Words, I own there is such a Thing as Natural Religion.

More particularly, there are some Principles of great and universal Importance, relating to the Being, the Attributes, the Providence of God, Man's Free-agency, the moral Differences of Things, and future Retributions, which it highly concerns all Mankind to know and to acknowledge. There are also Duties incumbent upon Men with respect to God, with respect to one another, and with respect to themselves and the right Government of their own Appetites, which they are oblig'd to observe; and which may be justly said to be founded on the very Nature and Constitution of Things; in as much as there

there is a real Fitness and Decency, and Congruity in them, antecedently to any positive Appointment; and independent of Opinion, or Custom, or human Compact.

I own, that the Reason of Mankind when rightly exercis'd and improv'd, will approve those Principles and those Duties as most just and true, most reasonable and fitting; and that there is a kind of natural Sense of Right and Wrong, of the moral Beauty and Fitness of Things, and the contrary; which, when it is not depraved and over-power'd by vicious Prejudices, and by the Influence of exorbitant Lusts and Appetites, and partial selfish Interests, tends to lead Men to esteem and chuse some Actions as good and fit, beautiful and lovely, from the Practice of which there arises an inward Satisfaction and Complacency; and to dislike and condemn the contrary, the Practice of which accordingly produces an inward Dissatisfaction and Remorse; and that in all such Cases Reason also leads Men to conclude, that it is the Will of God that they shou'd do those Things, and shun the contrary. And when once we regard it as the Will of God our supreme Lord and moral Governour, then we consider it not merely as fit and reasonable in itself, but as a divine Law. For that which properly makes any thing a divine Law, is its being forc'd by the Will and Authority of the divine Law-giver, who therefore will reward or punish his reasonable Creatures according to their Obedience or Disobedience. And this divine Law may be justly call'd the Law of Nature, as having its Foundation in Nature itself, and the real Differences of Things; and it may be call'd the Law of Reason, as being highly agreeable to the impartial, unprejudic'd Reason of Mankind.

This Law of Nature and Reason, which may be justly regarded as the Law of God, all Mankind
are

are under; and in this respect God has not *left himself without Witnesses* among the Gentiles; in as much as from the Discoveries made in the Works of Creation and Providence, from the natural Sense of Good and Evil, some Remains of which are in all Mankind, and from the Deductions of Reason rightly exercis'd and improv'd, they might have attain'd to a Knowledge of the main Principles and Duties of the Law of Nature or natural Religion.

But since it is evident in Fact and Experience (I am not now inquiring whence or how it came to be so, but it is evident in Fact that so it is) that Mankind are involv'd in great Darkness and Corruption, that their Reason and moral Sense is greatly weaken'd and deprav'd, so that if left to themselves they are apt to entertain very wrong Apprehensions of Religion, and very prone to neglect and counteract their Duty in the most important Instances: This being the true State of the Case, if God shou'd give an external extraordinary Revelation for clearing the great Principles of natural Religion, which thro' the Corruption of Mankind were incumber'd with much Darkness and Prejudices, and for directing them in the several Parts of their Duty, and inforcing the Practice of them by the most powerful and engaging Motives; and also, for discovering to them some Things which they cou'd not otherwise have certainly known and discover'd, and which yet are of great Use and Advantage to our Instruction and Comfort; this wou'd be a signal Benefit, and a great Instance of the divine Goodness and Compassion towards us.

Accordingly, God has actually given such a Revelation contain'd in the holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testament, which exhibits a clear Discovery of the great Principles and Duties of the Law of Nature, and renders them more obvious and certain to the Bulk of Mankind, than otherwise they wou'd be; and inforces the practice of universal Righteousness

Righteousness with the strongest Motives; and, besides this, instructs us in several Things of Importance to us to know, which otherwise we cou'd not have certainly known and discover'd.

And this Revelation not only bears in its Doctrines and Precepts the Characters of the divine Wisdom and Goodness, but was confirm'd by the most illustrious Attestations, particularly by numerous uncontrolled Miracles; Works visibly transcending all human Power, and which therefore demonstrate the Interposition of superior Beings; which cou'd not be evil Ones, for they would never lend their Assistance to confirm a Religion, the great Design of which is to reclaim Sinners from Vice and Wickedness, and to promote universal Righteousness and Purity; they must therefore have been wrought by the immediate Power of God himself; or, which comes to the same thing, by the assistance and agency of good Beings acting under him and by his Direction. And of these Facts we have as full Proof as can be reasonably desir'd of any Facts which we ourselves did not see, and which yet it wou'd be counted unreasonable not to believe.

From whence it follows, that it highly concerns us, whom God hath favour'd with such a Revelation, to receive it with a reverential Regard, and with a deep Sense of our Obligations to his Goodness, to be unfeignedly thankful for it, and careful to improve it. And as to others who have not this Privilege, it becomes us to leave them to God, who hath not left himself without Witness among them, and who, we may be sure, will deal with them conformably to infinite Wisdom and Goodness.

Upon this View of Things, it appears that there is a Harmony and Agreement between the Law of Nature and external Revelation; that the Former does not make the Latter useless or unnecessary, and that the Latter is friendly to the Former, clears, strengthens and improves it;

it; sets the great Principles and Duties of it in a stronger Light, and inforces it with more powerful Motives; and makes additional Discoveries of some Things, which, tho' otherwise we shou'd not have known, tend highly to promote the End of all Religion, which is to raise our Natures to the Perfection of Purity and Happiness in the Vision and Enjoyment of the Deity. Thus the Law of Nature and Revelation rightly understood mutually assist and support each other. But the Author's Design is to advance such a Notion of the Law of Nature as wou'd utterly exclude all Revelation, and render it not only useless, but impossible. This has led him to give a strange Account of the Law of Nature, and to say inconsistent Things concerning it, just as it answer'd his present Design.

But I shall now proceed to a more distinct Examination of his Scheme.



CHAP. II.

Concerning the vast Extent the Author gives to the Law of Nature, as taking in every Thing founded on the Reason and Nature of Things.

IT has been already observ'd, that our Author often takes the Law of Nature in a very large and extensive Sense, as comprehending whatever is founded in the Reason and Nature of Things throughout the Universe. Indeed I don't see what this properly has to do in the present Question; since the Question properly is only about the Law that is given to Mankind, or what *it is necessary for Man to know, believe, profess, and practise*, as this Author expresses it, p. 5 *. And I think it must

* P. 4.

must be own'd, that there may be many things founded in the Reason of Things, taken in this extensive Sense, in which we are not properly concern'd. But since this Gentleman is pleas'd to represent the Law of Nature in this vast and comprehensive Extent, that he may the better prove and support the absolute Perfection of that Law, and that nothing can possibly be added to it; let us consider what he offers on this Head.

He tells us, p. 13 *, that the Law of Nature *takes in every thing that is founded on the Reason and Nature of Things.* This he represents to be of so great an Extent, that it is the Law, or Rule for God himself, and for all intelligent Beings, as well as Man; and he often expresses himself, as if he thought it was in the same Sense, and in the same Respects a Rule and Law to God, and to all Creatures. To this purpose he observes, that this Law " is a perfect Rule " to the most perfect Being, and therefore may much " more be a Rule to his imperfect Creatures, since " their whole Perfection consists in imitating him, and " governing their Actions by the *same Rule*, p. 398, " 399 †." That " it is not only the first but the last " Law of God; for it is eternal, a Law by which " God governs his own Actions, and by which he " expects the whole rational World should govern " theirs; that it is necessary to be observ'd, not only " in this World, and in ten thousand Worlds more; " if there were ever so many, but in Heaven it self, " and that too for ever, p. 59 ||. And he supposes this Law to be known to all Men in its just Extent. Thus in the Passage now cited, after having said, that it is *the Law by which God governs his own Actions, and by which he expects the whole rational World should govern theirs*, he adds, that " God " daily implants it in the Minds of all Men." He affirms, that " Reason tells Men every thing God

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" can

“ can be suppos’d to require, p. 188 *.” And again, that “ what the Light of Nature teaches us concerning the Divine Perfections, demonstrates what “ God, from his infinite Wisdom or Goodness, can “ or cannot command, p. 103 †.

His Scheme therefore consider’d in this view, as far as I am able, upon the most impartial Consideration, to understand it, is this: That the eternal Reason and Fitness of Things (which he makes to be the Law of Nature) is the sole Rule of God’s Actions as well as ours; and that this Reason and Fitness of Things, according to which God proceeds in all his Dealings towards Man and other rational Beings, and by which we are to govern all our Actions, is known to us in all its Extent by our own Reason, without Revelation; and therefore we know by our own Reason, without Revelation, all that it is fit for God at any time to require, or for Men to know and practise; and consequently need no Revelation to inform us in any Instance, either what God will do, and how he will deal with us, or what Conduct we are to observe.

This Scheme is certainly one of the most extraordinary that ever appear’d. And if this Author had open’d it at once, and laid it before the Reader in one View, it cou’d scarce impose upon the meanest Understanding; but he has taken great Care to involve it in such Obscurity, and to deliver it in such a confus’d and ambiguous way, by scatter’d Hints throughout his Work, that it is no easy thing to understand his Meaning.

I shall not critically examine into the Propriety of that Expression he so often makes use of, *the eternal Reason of Things*, and which he supposes to be the Rule of God’s Actions. Since the Things themselves and their Natures, and consequently the Relations and Respects they bear, did not exist from Eternity; the only Thing that can be meant by the eternal Reason
of

of Things, and by its being a Rule to God, is this, That the infinite Mind of God eternally comprehends all the Ideas of Just and Good, of Regular and Beautiful, in all the possible Connexions and Combinations of Things; and that in all his Actions he proceeds according to the most fair and perfect Ideas of his own Mind. So that it might more properly be said, that the Rule by which God always acts, is the *all-comprehending Reason of his own Mind*, to which the perfect Rectitude of his Will is ever conformable. And this seems to be the Account the Author himself gives of it, p. 23 *. It was this Reason of his own Mind that determin'd him in creating the World, to do all Things in the most just and regular and admirable Order; and in governing the World he proceeds by the same Rule, that is, he always does that which appears, to his own infinite Understanding, to be most wise and just, and all Things consider'd best and fittest to be done. And if this be all that this Gentleman means by saying, that the *Fitness of Things is the Rule of God's Actions*, and that his *Will is always determin'd by the Reason and Nature of Things*; if by this and such other Expressions; which he so often repeats, be meant no more, than that God always does that which his own infinite Mind sees to be fit and just and reasonable for him to do, it will easily be own'd, that in this Sense he always acts according to the Fitness of Things; but then many Things he may, in his infinite Wisdom, see to be just and proper, which we shou'd not know to be so, except it pleas'd him to discover them to us. If the all-comprehending Reason of his own Mind be the Rule by which God acts, and according to which he governs the World; I think it must be own'd that this is of an infinitely greater Extent than that by which we act, as far transcending it as God's Understanding transcends ours.

The Account this Writer commonly gives of what he understands by the Reason of Things is this, that it signifies the Natures of the Things themselves, and the various Relations and Respects they bear to one another, with the Fittests arising from them. If so, then the Reason of Things is wide and extensive as the whole Compass of universal Nature; it takes in the incomprehensible Nature of God himself, and the Natures and various Relations and Respects of all Beings whatsoever, both to God and to one another. And will this Author in good earnest undertake to shew, that Man, every Man of the meanest Capacity, even though he can't read in his Mother-Tongue, (for to every such Person he supposes the Reason and Nature of Things to be clear and plain, p. 295 *.) comprehends the whole Extent of Things, the Nature of God himself, and of all other Beings, as well as his own, and all the possible Respects of Things, and all the Fittests arising from them in every Circumstance?

Supposing the Fitness or Reason of Things, in this wide extensive Sense, to be the Rule according to which God acts in the Government of the World, yet I think it can't be denied that this universal Reason or Fitness of Things is only known to his own infinite Understanding, and therefore can only be a Rule to him, but not to us. When therefore this Author says, that God and Man must act according to the Reason of Things, the only tolerable Sense that this is capable of is, that as God always does what is fit and reasonable for him to do, so Man is also to do what is fit and reasonable for him to do; but not that the Reason of Things by which God acts, is of the same Extent with that by which Man is to act. For none can suppose this, except he supposes that God and Man hold the same Rank in the Order of Beings, and are in the same Condition and Cir-

* P. 267.

Circumstances; which is so palpably absurd, that our Author himself would not think proper to avow it. That Reason or Fitness of Things, according to which God acts, arises from the infinite Perfection of his own Nature, and from what his own all-comprehending Wisdom sees to be most becoming him to do, as the supreme Governor of the World, and to be most conducive to the universal Order and Harmony of Things. And as there are many Reasons and Fitnesses relating to his own infinite Majesty, and to the Order, Beauty, and Good of the Whole, obvious to his perfect Understanding, which we do not know and cannot judge of; it follows that the Reason and Fitness of Things, by which he proceeds, is of a superior Consideration, and of far greater Extent than that by which Man governs his Actions; and many Things may be just and fit upon such an extended View of Things, which do not appear to be so upon a narrower View; and consequently many Things may seem to him to be just and proper, which we do not know to be so, because we can take in only Part of the Scheme, and do not behold Things in their just Harmony. Indeed none can pretend to know what is for the Good of the whole Universe, to which the private Good of any particular Being or Order of Beings must give way, for the same Reason that the private Good of any particular Person or Family must give way to that of the whole Society or Community, but he that knows the universal System of Things, and has a clear View of all the Natures of Things, and all the various Respects and Relations the several Orders of Beings bear to one another, and to the Whole, yea and of all Times and Seasons; for some Things may seem fit or unfit for the present, which taking in Futurity, and the Effects and Consequences of them, may have a contrary Aspect.

I cannot therefore acquit this Writer from great Rashness, when he affirms, that “ Reason tells us “ what is worthy of God, and therefore tells us e- “ very thing God can be suppos’d to require, p. 187, “ 188 *.” and “ that what the Light of Nature “ teaches us concerning the Divine Perfections, when “ duly attended to, demonstrates what God in his “ infinite Wisdom or Goodness can or cannot com- “ mand, p. 103 †.” It is true, that in some plain Cases we may certainly know, by the Reason he hath implanted in us, what infinite Wisdom and Goodness can or cannot require or do; and may safely pronounce accordingly. But then ’tis equally true, that we cannot in all Cases take upon us to judge and to determine, what an infinitely wise and good Being may or may not see fit to do or to require; which is no more than to say, that we cannot comprehend the whole Extent of infinite Wisdom, or pretend to know all the Reasons he may have for his proceeding in such a manner. And this Writer himself declares, that he knows none at present that pretend to *so extensive a Knowledge, as to take in the whole Scheme, Order and State of Things*, p. 384 ‖. And yet in many Passages of his Book, some of which have been cited above, he insinuates that all rational Creatures must be capable of knowing that Reason of Things in its whole Extent, which he supposes to be the Rule of God’s Actions; and consequently must be capable of knowing, merely by the Force of their own Reason, all that it is fit and proper, in any Instance, for God himself to do and to require, as well as what is proper for Man to do. A great Part of his Book proceeds upon this Supposition. ’Tis on this Principle that he argues against positive, or, as he calls them, arbitrary Precepts, and charges it as Tyranny in God to enjoin them; by which he means all Precepts that we our selves do not antecedently see

* P. 165.

† P. 89.

‖ P. 347.

see the Fitness of. And indeed if God may have Reasons for Things that we are not acquainted with, (which must be own'd, except it be said that our Understandings are of an equal Extent with his) the Argument he has so much laboured falls. For tho' God always acts agreeably to the Reason and Fitness of Things, that is, always does and requires what is fit and proper for him to do and to require, yet if in many Cases we are not proper Judges of that Reason and Fitness, then there may be Commands which he may see it proper to lay upon us, and there may be Methods of Proceedure towards us, depending on his infinite Wisdom, which he sees the Fitness of, though we do not, and which we cou'd not well know, except he is pleas'd to reveal his Will; and he is the proper Judge of the fittest Manner and Method of communicating his Will to us, and may have many ways of doing it. From whence it follows, that if from Proofs sufficient in their kind, we come to know that he has thus discover'd and communicated his Will and Intentions to us, we are oblig'd to pay a sacred Regard to those Significations of his Will, in whatsoever manner they are made to us.

And now I think it appears, that all this Gentleman's magnificent Talk about the absolute Perfection of the Law of Nature, as taking in every thing that is founded in the Nature and Reason of Things, a Law to God himself and to all reasonable Beings, is of little advantage to his main Design, which is to shew, that there can be no place nor use for an external Revelation; since the Law of Nature, taken in this vast Extent, is only perfectly known to God himself. Nor can he ever make this Part of his Scheme answer his Design, except he will please to prove that our Understandings are of equal Extent with infinite Wisdom, and that we have an equal Comprehension of all the Natures of Things, and

all their various Respects and Relations, and the Fittests arising from thence (for this is what he means by the Reason of things) throughout the whole Universe with God himself.

Leaving therefore this romantick Account of the Law of Nature, which the Author has advanc'd to prove its absolute Perfection, let us consider the Law of Nature in a narrower View, as properly relating to Man, and to what *it is the Will of God Men shou'd know, believe, profess, and practise*, as this Author speaks, p. 5 *. And here his Notion is, that this Law of Nature, which is a Rule to Mankind, is that very Law, and no other, that was given to Man at his first Creation, to which nothing cou'd ever be added by any subsequent Revelation, and which is so clear to all Men, that it cannot be made clearer.



C H A P. III.

That the Law given to Mankind at the Beginning, was not so absolutely Perfect, that nothing cou'd ever be added to it by any subsequent Revelation.

THE Author of Christianity as old as the Creation, frequently supposes the Law of Nature to be that Law which was given to Man at the Beginning, at his first Creation; and therefore calls it "the Law of our Creation implanted in us from the Beginning by God himself," p. 4 †. "The true primitive and natural Religion implanted in Mankind from the Creation," p. 379 ‡. And to signify this, he describes it under the Character of *Original Revelation*. And, this is that Sense of the Law of Nature, to which the Design of his Book properly

* P. 4.

† P. 4.

‡ P. 343.

properly leads him, which is to shew that there can be no other Religion but what was given to Mankind from the beginning of the World without any Addition or Alteration; that therefore Christianity must either be as Old as the Creation, or it cannot be a true Religion; that if it makes any Addition to that original natural Law, or in any Instance varies from it, (as in many Parts of his Book he endeavours to shew it does) this is a Proof that it is not a divine Revelation. Instead therefore of intitling his Book *Christianity as Old as the Creation*, the Title wou'd have run more agreeably to his Design, thus, *Christianity not as Old as the Creation, and therefore false*. But this might have shock'd his Readers too much at first, which for many Reasons he thought not proper to do.

That I may do the Author justice, I shall fairly represent his Scheme in his own Words.

He first lays it down as a Principle which will not be denied, that “ none who believe there is
“ a God who governs Mankind, but must believe
“ he has given them a Law for the governing their
“ Actions; and that this is implied in the very No-
“ tion of Governour and Governed, p. 10 *. That
therefore it is certain that “ God from the Beginning
“ gave Mankind some Rule or Law for their Con-
“ duct; and that the observing of that made
“ them acceptable to him; or else it wou'd not
“ answer the End for which it was given; that,
“ that Religion which God gave Men from the
“ Beginning, was a most perfect Religion; since
“ no Religion can come from a Being of infinite
“ Wisdom and Perfection, but what is absolutely
“ perfect, and a Religion absolutely perfect can-
“ not admit of any Alteration, or be capable of
“ Addition or Diminution, but must be as immu-
“ table as the Author of it; and therefore that exter-
“ nal

* P. 9.

“ nal Revelation cannot add any thing to a Religion
 “ thus absolutely perfect, universal, and immutable,
 “ p. 3, 4.” He represents this as “ the one true
 “ Religion, which all have been ever bound to believe
 “ and profess;” and that it contains “ all that God
 “ wills them to know, believe, profess, and prac-
 “ tise, p. 5.” Accordingly the Title of his 6th
 Chapter runs thus, that “ *the Religion of Nature*
 (by which he means, as he had describ’d it in his
 first Chapter, the Religion or Law given to all Man-
 kind from the Beginning) “ is an absolutely perfect
 “ Religion, and that external Revelation can neither
 “ add to nor take from its Perfection.” He pro-
 poses to himself an Objection, which he calls a plau-
 sible one, in the Beginning of the seventh Chapter,
 “ whether external Revelation, building on the
 “ Foundation of natural Religion, may not extend
 “ to such Things as the Light of Nature cou’d not
 “ reach, without contradicting any thing it teaches?”
 And this he denies, because he has prov’d, “ that
 “ the Religion of Nature is so perfect, that nothing
 “ cou’d be added to it, p. 69 *.” And then he goes
 on to shew, that “ original Revelation (that is, the
 natural Law given to Man from the Beginning)
 “ comprehends every thing that tends to the Ho-
 “ nour of God, and the Good of Mankind, p. 70.”
 He concludes therefore, that “ this Perfection of
 “ the Law of Nature sufficiently exposes all Preten-
 “ ces to a new Religion.”

It appears from these several Passages, and many
 others to the same purpose, that the Perfection
 which our Author ascribes to the original Law of
 Nature given to all Mankind at the Beginning, is
 such an absolute Perfection, as intirely excludes all
 Addition to it, or Variation from it, so that nothing
 can now make a Part of Religion, but what made
 a Part of Religion from the Beginning of the World;

it must continue in all respects exactly the same that it was at first, neither more nor less; no more to be believ'd, and no more to be done by any Man than was at the Beginning of the Creation. It is on this Foundation that he argues, that there is no room for additional Revelation. I shall therefore examine it distinctly.

It will easily be granted, that the Law of Nature given to Man at the Beginning was perfect at first, if by that be meant no more than that it was excellently suited to the State Man was then in; but it does not follow, that it cou'd never admit of any Additions, except it cou'd be prov'd, that God, by giving Man a Law, bound his own Hands, and brought himself under an Obligation never to lay any further Injunctions upon him, but what he requir'd of him when he was first created, and never to give any other Significations or Discoveries of his Will but what he then gave.

When Man was created, he receiv'd this Law among the rest, as Part of the Law of Nature, that whatever it shou'd please God at any Time to require, he must yield a ready Obedience to it; and if in consequence of this, God shou'd be pleas'd to signify his Will in any particular Instance, then this wou'd from that Moment commence Man's Duty, though not before; and it might still be said in that case, that Man acted up to the *original Obligation of the Fitness of Things*, (to use the Author's Expressions.)

If Man had continued in a State of Innocence, his Reason uncorrupt and unprejudic'd, though he might clearly collect the standing Part of his Duty, yet he cou'd not even then pretend of himself to know all that God might at any Time for various Reasons think fit to enjoin. There was nothing in the original Law of his Creation to make him think that God cou'd not or wou'd not at any Time require any thing but what he then actually requir'd;
only

only this he might be sure of, that God wou'd never require any thing but for just and wise Reasons; and in what way soever he shou'd signify his Will, it was his Duty to lie open to those Discoveries.

It may therefore justly be affirm'd, that though Mankind had continued in a State of perfect uncorrupted Innocence, there might have been room for Additions to that original Law that was given to Man at the Beginning of the Creation. But supposing an Alteration in the Condition and Circumstances of Mankind since that Law was given, it is still more evident that it might be fit and proper to add something to that original Law, accommodated to that Alteration of Circumstances.

I don't see with what Consistency this Author himself can talk of the absolute Perfection and Immutability of the original Law of Nature, since (as has been already observ'd) he himself makes Men's Duty to be varied according to the Alteration of Circumstances*. He talks indeed often of the immutable Nature, and the unchangeable Relations of Things. He tells us, p. 61 †. that "the Reason why the Law of Nature is immutable, is, because it is founded on the unalterable Reason of Things;" Or as he expresses it, p. 6. "on the Nature of Things, and the immutable Relations they bear to one another." He often mentions the unchangeable Fitness of Things; but then he lays it down as a Rule, that "it is the Tendency of Actions which makes them either good or bad; and 'tis the Circumstances Men are under by which we are to judge of the Tendency of Actions, p. 345 †." And these Circumstances he represents as continually changing, p. 18 ‖. And again, p. 27 **. he talks of "the numberless Circumstances which attend us, and which perpetually varying, may make the same Actions, according as Men are differently affected

* See above p. 9, 10.

† P. 51.

‡ P. 312.

‖ P. 16.

** P. 23.

“affected by them, good or bad.” And this, according to him, holds not merely in Matters indifferent, but in Things of a moral Nature; for of these he is speaking in the Passages now cited, and the Instances he produces are of this kind, p. 345 *. He tells us particularly, in the same page, that “what we call Incest, is now for many good Reasons not to be allow’d of; yet it was a Duty in the Children of *Adam* and *Eve*.” Here therefore is an Instance of a Thing which originally was lawful and a Duty in the Beginning of the World, but which afterwards became unlawful, upon an Alteration in the State and Circumstances of Mankind. Indeed after all his magnificent Talk of the Immutability of the Law of Nature, and the unchangeable Nature and Fitness of Things, he seems to me to think, that there is no Duty of an unchangeable Nature, none but what may vary according to the Alteration of Circumstances; and no particular Precept, but what may in some Instances cease to oblige, and of a Duty become a Sin, and the contrary. It cannot therefore be said, that the Law of Nature was so immutably fix’d in the Beginning, that nothing could become a Duty to Man afterwards, which was not so then; and yet this seems to be the Strain of his reasoning in many Parts of his Book, and particularly in his first Chapter, and without which it falls to the ground. If he says, that still the Law of Nature is immutable; for though that particular Thing, which was our Duty before by that Law, may upon an Alteration of Circumstances cease to oblige, yet the Law is still the same, which requires us to act according to the Nature of Things, and the Circumstances we are in: This Excuse, which is the only one that can be made, and which he seems to insinuate for salving his Hypothesis, and rendring his Scheme consistent, does really destroy it.

For

* P. 312, 313. † P. 51.

For at this Rate, the suppos'd Perfection and Immutability of that original Law, given to Man at his first Creation, does not hinder but that there may be Additions and Alterations suited to the Circumstances Men might afterwards be in; and consequently this Argument against Revelation is good for nothing, That the Law given to Mankind was perfect at the Beginning, and therefore external Revelation cou'd not add any thing to a Religion thus absolutely perfect and immutable.

By this we may judge of the Strength of the great Argument the Author urges with so much Pomp, for the Perfection of the original Law of Nature given to Mankind at the Beginning, drawn from the Perfection of its Author. He tells us, p. 3. that "no Religion can come from a Being of infinite Wisdom and Perfection, but what is absolutely perfect; and a Religion absolutely perfect cannot admit of any Alteration, or be capable of Addition and Diminution, but must be as immutable as the Author of it." And again, p. 60*. "Can Laws be imperfect, where a Legislator is absolutely perfect? Can Time discover any thing to him, which he did not foresee from Eternity? And as his Wisdom is always the same, so is his Goodness; and consequently from the Consideration of both these, his Laws must always be the same. The Law of Nature therefore must be as perfect a Law as the Gospel, except you will say, that God did not arrive to the Perfection of Wisdom and Goodness, till about 1700 Years since." And accordingly he adds, p. 61†. that "if Christianity was a new Religion, then from the Time it commenc'd, you must own God is mutable; and that such Additions have been made to the all-perfect Laws of infinite Wisdom, as constitute a new Religion."

I think if there were any thing in this way of arguing, it might as well prove that because God is absolutely perfect and immutable, therefore all the Works he hath made must be perfect and immutable too. And indeed though God, the Giver of the Law, the Author of that original Constitution establish'd at Man's first Creation, be perfect and unchangeable in himself, yet except it cou'd be also prov'd, that Man, to whom that Law was given, and for whom that Constitution was made, is immutable too and absolutely perfect, and his Circumstances incapable of Alteration, it cannot be concluded that that original Law and Constitution is absolutely immutable and capable of no Additions or Alterations; for upon Supposition that Man is subject to change, (and who can deny it?) and that there is an Alteration in his Circumstances from what they were at first, a wise and good God may see it proper to give new Injunctions, and enter into some new Methods of dealing with him, for which there was no Occasion at first, nor wou'd have been without such an Alteration in his State and Circumstances. I own that "Inconstancy, as it argues a Defect of Wisdom or Power, can't belong to a Being infinitely wise and powerful," as the Author speaks, p. 20 *. But then he himself tells us, p. 105 †. that "did not God always employ the most fit and suitable means, he wou'd act contrary to the Rules prescrib'd him by his own unerring Reason;" and that "to alter one's Conduct, as Circumstances alter, is not only an Act of the greatest Prudence and Judgment, but is consistent with the greatest Steadiness, *ibid.*"

'Tis true God perfectly saw and knew all Things from the Beginning; he saw all those Alterations or Changes that were to happen in the successive Revolutions of Ages; and he knew from the Be-

* P. 17. † P. 91.

Beginning what Course it was proper for him to take in every suppos'd Circumstance of Things. But it does not follow, that therefore he gave all the Revelations and all the Laws at once from the first, that ever he shou'd think fit to give; but rather that as the Changes and Alterations were to happen successively, and to have their Effect in their proper Seasons, so his Laws and Constitutions were successively to take place according to the Exigency of Things.

When therefore this Writer argues, that "if
 " there were the least Difference between the Law
 " of Nature and the Gospel, that wou'd suppose
 " some Defect in one of them, and reflect upon the
 " Author of both, who certainly was equally good
 " and wise when he gave the one as when he gave
 " the other (if it may be call'd another) Law,
 " p. 378*:" Not to take notice of the Disingenuity of this Paragraph, where he speaks as if he believ'd that God was the Author of the Gospel, when it is certain, that if by the Gospel be meant what all understand by it, the Christian Religion as contain'd in the Holy Scriptures, he is far from believing that God was the Author of it: To pass this by; though there be some Difference between the original Law of Nature given to Man at the Beginning, and the Gospel, this does not argue a Defect in either of them. For supposing the one to be the Law of innocent Nature given to Man at the Beginning, at his first Creation, the other to be a Constitution adapted to the Condition of Man as in a sinful State, there may be some Difference (though no Contradiction) between them, arising from the different Circumstances of Mankind, to which they respectively have a Reference, and yet both may be perfect in their kind, and wisely order'd, and each of them admirably suited to the Design for which they were given and appointed.

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Our Author indeed supposes that the State of Things between God and Man is now exactly the same that it was at first, and upon that builds an Argument for the Immutability of the original Law of Nature, to shew that it is incapable of any Addition or Alteration. " If God is unchangeable (says he) our
" Duty to him must be so too; if human Nature continues the same, and Men at all Times stand in the
" same Relation to one another, the Duties which
" result from those Relations must be always the
" same; and consequently our Duty to God and
" Man must, from the Beginning of the World to
" the End, always be the same, always alike plain
" and perspicuous, and can neither be chang'd in
" whole nor in part, p. 18. *." And to the same purpose he saith, p. 188 †, that " Religion thus founded
" on those immutable Relations (*viz.* the Relations Men stand in to God and to one another) " must,
" at all Times and in all Places, be alike immutable;
" since external Revelation not being able to make
" any Change in those Relations, and the Duties
" that necessarily result from them, can only re-
" commend and inculcate those Duties." All that these Passages prove is, that the main fundamental Duties of Morality are the same now that they were from the Beginning, which will be freely granted. And this is all that the many long Quotations this Gentleman produces with so much Pomp from many Christian Divines, concerning the immutable Obligation of the Law of Nature, do prove. And in this Sense it may be justly said, that our Saviour *came not to destroy the Law, but to fulfil it*, to set the great Principles of it in a clearer and stronger Light, when almost lost and defac'd thro' the Ignorance and Corruption of Mankind, and to engage Men, by the most powerful Motives, to a diligent

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Observance of its Precepts. In this Sense it will be easily acknowledg'd (what the Author needlessly takes a great deal of pains to prove) that *no instituted Religion can contradict the Law of Nature*; and there is an *exact Conformity* (as he expresses it) *between internal and external Revelation*; that is, that the one cannot contradict the other, and any pretended instituted Religion that contradicts or subverts any of those Rules of Morality that necessarily flow from the Relations between God and Man, must be false. But if the Question be as this Gentleman himself puts it, p. 69 *. *Whether external Revelation, building on the Foundation of natural Religion, may not extend to such Things as the Light of Nature cou'd not reach, without contradicting anything it teaches?* there is nothing in the Argument, by him here propos'd, to prove that it cannot be so.

Let us suppose the Relation between God and Man to be unchangeable; this does not prove, that nothing cou'd ever become a Duty to Man, but what was so in the Beginning of the Creation. For this very Relation necessarily lays him under an Obligation to obey whatsoever Injunctions God shou'd, at any Time, in his infinite Wisdom, see fit to lay upon him. It may be said, in some Sense, that *human Nature continues the same*; that is, the same in its essential Faculties, in all that is essentially necessary to constitute human Nature; but this is consistent with a very great Variation in the Condition and Circumstances of Mankind, and this may make it proper to give some new Constitutions accommodated to that Change in their Circumstances and Condition. Thus, *e.g.* a Change from a State of Innocence to a State of Guilt and Disobedience to God, whenever or howsoever that happened, must be a very great and considerable Change in the Condition of Mankind. And such a Change there cer-

certainly was, take what Hypothesis you please. There was a Time when Man was innocent, and when he had not sinned; except it be said, that God made Man, at his first Creation, actually sinful and corrupt, which wou'd be to charge our Corruption upon God himself as the Author, and lay the Blame of all our Transgressions and Follies upon the original Constitution of the human Nature. And this Writer, who so zealously contends that God gave Man, at his first Creation, a perfect Law to be govern'd by, and form'd Man to be govern'd by that Law, must also maintain, if he be consistent with himself, that God made Man at first every way capable to fulfil and obey that Law; and indeed he affirms, that every Man is still able to do it, p. 375 *. The Question he puts, p. 4 †. " Shall we say " that God, who had the forming human Understanding as well as his own Laws, did not know " how to adjust the one to the other?" may be equally applied to prove, that God adjusted Man's original Ability to that perfect original Law. Whenever therefore Man first sinned and transgressed the Divine Law, at what Time soever this happen'd, there must necessarily be a remarkable Alteration in his Condition and Circumstances. The same Light of Nature that discover'd that original Law and his Duty to him, cou'd not but discover to him, that the Breach of that Law render'd him obnoxious to the divine Displeasure; and this must fill him with guilty Fears. The essential Relations between God and Man did indeed still continue the same; that is, God still sustained the Character of Man's Creator and sovereign Lord, his most wise Governor and Judge; and Man was still as much as before related to God as his Creature, his Subject and Servant; but then God was now further to be consider'd as the offended Law-giver and Judge, most

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justly

* P. 340.

† P. 3.

justly displeas'd with his guilty Creature ; and Man was to be consider'd as a Transgressor of the Law given him for the Rule of his Duty, and who had by his Disobedience forfeited his Title to the divine Favour, and the Reward he wou'd otherwise have obtain'd. Here then was a remarkable Alteration of Circumstances, or Change in the State of Things between God and Man. If therefore God shou'd, in his infinite Wisdom and Goodness, establish a new Constitution, suited to the Alteration of Man's Circumstances, in which he declares what wou'd be his Method of dealing towards his guilty Creatures, how far and upon what Terms he wou'd be reconcil'd, and what Reward he wou'd bestow, even upon their imperfect Obedience ; this wou'd not properly be an abrogating that original Law, in its preceptive Part, or a cancelling the Obligations and Duties which necessarily flow from the Relations between God and Man, or between Men themselves ; but a gracious Constitution, which supposing that original Law, and being founded upon it, provides for the Necessities of our State, in a manner that is for the Glory of God, and for our Direction and Comfort.

What has been offer'd may help us to judge of the Author's manner of stating the Question at the end of his 5th Chapter. He there pretends to tell us " what alone is the Point that must decide the
 " Question, whether natural and revealed Religion
 " do really differ ? As for natural Religion (says
 " he) that takes in all those Duties which flow from
 " the Nature and Reason of Things, and the Re-
 " lations we stand in to God and our Fellow-Crea-
 " tures ; and consequently was there an instituted Re-
 " ligion which differs from that of Nature, its Pre-
 " cepts must be arbitrary, as not founded on the
 " Nature and Reason of Things, but depending on
 " mere Will and Pleasure, otherwise it wou'd be
 " the

“ the same with natural Religion, p. 114 *.” To the same purpose he argues in his 7th Chapter, “ that God can require nothing of his Creatures, but what tends to their Good ; and whatsoever is of this kind is a Superstructure that belongs to the Law of Nature, p. 69 †.” And that “ original Revelation comprehends every thing that tends to the Honour of God and the Good of Mankind, p. 70.” But if by *natural Religion* and *original Revelation* he means (as he must if he speaks to the purpose) the original Law given to Mankind at the Beginning, he plainly begs the Thing in question, when he supposes it to comprehend every thing that at any Time, and in any Circumstance or Condition of Things, shou’d be for the Honour of God and the Good of Mankind. This original Law did indeed comprehend whatever divine Wisdom saw necessary at the Time when it was given ; but supposing an Alteration in the Condition and Circumstances of Mankind, there may be some Things proper now which were not then ; and therefore there may be an *instituted Religion differing from that of Nature*, that is, differing in some respects from the original Religion of Nature, as it was at Man’s first Creation ; and yet *its Precepts not arbitrary*, if by that be meant *depending on mere unreasonable Will and Pleasure*, but founded on most just and wise Reasons, admirably adapted to the present Conditions and Circumstances of Mankind.

The Sum is this : God’s Will is always immutable and consistent with it self ; yet this same invariable Will may produce different Constitutions according to the different Circumstances his Creatures are in ; the Invariableness of his Will proves, that one Revelation cannot be contrary to another, but not that he may not reveal at one Time, what he did not reveal, or not so fully reveal before ; be-

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cause

* P. 99. † P. 59.

cause some Things may be proper to be known or done in one State of Things, which were not so proper or necessary in another. *e. g.* There was no need of a Mediator, if Man had continued innocent, or of God's declaring how and upon what Terms he wou'd be reconcil'd to his guilty offending Creatures; and therefore these Things cou'd not properly make a Part of what the Author calls *original* Revelation; but on Supposition of Man's being fallen into a corrupt State, these Things might very probably make a Part of a subsequent Revelation. To repent of their Sins, to confess them humbly before God, to apply to him for Pardon, and to comply with whatever Terms God shou'd appoint in order to their Reconciliation and Acceptance; this cou'd not properly be any Part of the Religion of innocent Creatures, and yet must necessarily belong to the Religion of sinful Creatures. On this foot all the Additions Christianity makes to the primitive original Law of Nature may well be accounted for. Supposing what this Author so often repeats, that God requires nothing of us, but what is suitable to the Relations between him and us, it may be shewn that Christianity, with all its Precepts and peculiar Doctrines, is very well suited to the Relation between God, consider'd as the wise and righteous Governor of the World, our offended but reconcilable Sovereign, and Man, consider'd as his offending Creature, fallen into Sin.

It will perhaps be said, That I suppose here that the human Nature is in a lapsed State, which the Author will not grant. But all that I suppose at present is, that Men are actually Sinners; and this is sufficient to support the Argument. But the Author has no Right to take it for granted, as he all along does in the present Question, that the Condition and Circumstances of the human Nature and of Mankind are exactly the same that they were from the

the Beginning; which is to take that for granted, which he knows is denied. 'Tis certain, that if we judge by all Appearances, the human Nature is now in a very degenerate State. The wisest Men in all Ages, even amongst the Heathens themselves, have own'd and complain'd of it, and have puzzled themselves to account how it came; and it seems most reasonable and most for the Honour of God to suppose, that the Nature of Man was originally in a more sound and healthful State than now it is. And supposing this (which at least is a possible Supposition) here is a reasonable Account to be given, why something may be added to that original Law of Nature given to Man in the Beginning, suited to the Change in the Condition and Circumstances of the human Nature.

But though the Author will not allow a Fall, as it has been commonly understood by Christians, [his Objections against the Account given of it in Scripture shall be consider'd afterwards] yet he must upon his own Hypothesis allow a Fall in another sense, that is, a Fall of most if not all Men from a State of Innocence to a State of actual Sin and Guilt. He supposes that Man was at first created innocent, and that every Man is so still, *capable of knowing and doing all that God requires*. He must also own (because it is a Matter of Fact that cannot reasonably be denied, and which indeed has been generally acknowledg'd in all Ages) that most if not all Men are actually Sinners when adult; that is, that they actually in some Instances or other transgress the Law of their Creation, which he represents as a *Law of unchangeable Purity and without Defect*; and consequently he must suppose, that most if not all Men are actually fallen from the Innocence, in which he supposes they were all created, into a State of Guilt; and if so, here is a remarkable Change in their Circumstances. Now I ask, in this Case,

what Assurance can they have (if they be tried by that original Law which they are conscious they have transgressed) of their being justified or rewarded? This Author tells us, that "God hath from the Beginning given Mankind a Rule or Law for their Conduct, by the Observance of which they are acceptable to him, p. 3." This supposes that they cannot properly be justified by that Law or intitled to the Reward by virtue of that Law, except they observe it.

If therefore they be conscious to themselves, that they have transgressed that Law, and fallen short of the Obedience which they ought and might have yielded, they must found their Hope of Pardon and Acceptance not upon the original Law it self, but upon something distinct from it, and that is, the Mercy of the Law-giver, dispensing with the Strictness of the original Law. And as to this the Author tells us, that "God's Mercy obliges him not to pardon any further than his infinite Wisdom sees fit, p. 41 *." And again, that "pardoning as well as punishing are transient Acts, the Effects of his Will, not Properties belonging to his Nature." From whence it follows, that whatever Hopes we might have from a general Consideration of the Divine Mercy, we cou'd not be absolutely certain how far God will pardon those that have transgress'd his Law, or reward an Obedience falling short of what that Law requires and enjoins, except he himself is pleas'd to reveal it. And if God shou'd make a positive Declaration of his Will to this purpose, and establish a gracious Constitution in which he has engag'd to pardon those that transgress his Law (though they have done it heinously and presumptuously, and in repeated Instances) upon their Repentance, and to reward even their imperfect (if sincere) Obedience with eternal Life;

Life; this is in the Nature of Things a Constitution distinct from and additional to the Law of our Creation, or that original Law given to Man at the Beginning, and of which we cannot have an absolute Certainty meerly from the Reason and Nature of Things, as I shall more fully shew afterwards. And if he shou'd give an exprefs Revelation to this purpose, and not meerly leave Men to general Hopes of his Mercy, it wou'd be an Instance of great Goodness in him, and which we shou'd be highly thankful for.



C H A P. IV.

That besides the moral Precepts of the Original Law of Nature obligatory on all Mankind from the Beginning, God may see fit, for wise Reasons, to appoint positive Precepts, and that these may answer very valuable Ends. And here an Occasion is taken to vindicate the positive Precepts of the Jewish and Christian Religion.

BEFORE I leave the present Question, which is, Whether any thing cou'd be added to that Law that was given to Mankind in the Beginning, it will be proper to consider what the Author offers concerning positive Precepts; whether besides Things that are evidently of a moral Nature, God can give any Precepts relating to Things, which, absolutely and in themselves consider'd, appear to us to be indifferent, and which, without an exprefs Command, we shou'd not think our selves oblig'd to observe; such are all ritual Observances in Religion. For on Supposition that God shou'd at any Time give any
Commands

Commands relating to Things of this kind, or shou'd institute any external Rites to be used in his Worship, which were not appointed and instituted from the Beginning, here is an Instance in which some Additions may be made in Religion to what was originally appointed; and these Additions cou'd only be known by extraordinary Revelation, by which only we cou'd be assur'd that such or such Rites were of divine Appointment. Accordingly our Author, who wou'd have no Place left for any external Revelation at all, and who will have it that Religion was in all its Parts absolutely immutable from the Beginning, incapable of the least Addition, zealously contends that God cannot give any positive Precepts; yea, he carries it so far as to charge it as Tyranny in God to lay any Injunctions of this kind upon us; that the giving them is absolutely inconsistent with the Wisdom and Goodness of God, and the Happiness of Mankind. On the Doctrine of positive Precepts he charges all the Superstition that has obtain'd in the World. He frequently insinuates, that no Religion can be true, or can come from God, which contains and requires any positive Precepts; from whence it follows, that since the Christian Religion has some positive Precepts, and the Jewish had far more, neither the one nor the other can be of Divine Original, or a true Divine Revelation. There is scarce any thing in his whole Book more labour'd than this Argument. It is the main Subject of three long Chapters, the ninth, tenth and eleventh, but there is scarce a Chapter in his Book that has not several things that look this way; he returns to it on all Occasions, which will make it the more necessary to consider particularly what he offers on this Head; not for any Weight I apprehend to be in the Argument, but because of the mighty Stress our Author seems to lay upon it, and the unusual Air of Confidence with which he advances it.

The Author's Scheme in this Part of it must be own'd to be new and extraordinary. 'Tis certain, that if we consider the general Sense of Mankind in all Ages, they have believ'd that God had a Power of injoining positive Precepts, and instituting religious Rites, because they have generally believ'd that God has actually instituted some Things of this kind, and have accordingly observ'd and regarded some such Rites, as of Divine Appointment. Our Author will undoubtedly attribute this to Superstition; and I freely own that they were often wrong in their Notion of the particular Rites which they suppos'd to be instituted by God; but that they were wrong in the Principle it self, that God has a Right to institute positive Rites in Religion; that this which seems to be a Principle of the Law of Nature it self, for which we have the Consent of Mankind, and which may therefore well pass for a common Notion, is false, there need some very strong Reasons to convince us; and yet I find little more advanc'd against it than strong and confident Assertions.

What makes it stranger in this Author to deny that God has this Power, is, that he allows this Right to Men themselves; he seems to allow, that Things which have no Worth in themselves, that is, Things which in themselves are not morally good or evil, may yet be subservient to Things truly excellent; but that these Things being of a mutable Nature, must be left to human Prudence. See p. 115, 116, 431*.

But surely if Men may make Appointments relating to such Things as are antecedently of an indifferent Nature, and may prudently accommodate them to Circumstances, God may do so too, and is certainly a much better Judge of what is proper, and accommodated to the Circumstances
of

* P. 95, 100, 390.

of Mankind, than any Man can pretend to be; and to represent it as Tyranny in God to interpose in any such Matters, is an inexcusable Rashness and Presumption, and highly derogatory to his supreme Authority and Dominion.

'Tis undoubtedly true, that an infinitely wise and good Being never does any thing that is unfit and unreasonable for him to do; but there may be very good Reasons for his laying some Commands upon us in Things, which consider'd absolutely and in general are of an indifferent Nature, some of which I shall have occasion to mention afterwards. But though in some Instances we shou'd not be able to assign the particular Reasons of the Divine Injunctions, this wou'd be no Reason for our not obeying them.

He wou'd be justly esteem'd a saucy Servant or Child, that shou'd declare to an earthly Parent, or Master, or Prince, I will not obey you in any Instance, except you tell me precisely why you command me to do it, and what are your particular Views in it, and your Reasons for requiring it; and yet this seems to be the Conduct the Author prescribes to be observ'd towards the supreme Governor of the World. We are not to obey him in any Instance, except he condescends to tell us precisely what were his Reasons for enjoining it, and except we our selves plainly see, that that particular Thing is for our own Interest; for he expressly declares, that *God can require nothing of Men, but what they for the sake of their own Interest were oblig'd to do*, p. 359 *. But this seems to me to be contrary to what this Author so often speaks of the Reason and Fitness of Things. As it is a Principle of eternal Truth, that a God of infinite Wisdom and Justice and Goodness can never require an unjust Thing, so it is a necessary Obligation, founded on the very Nature

Nature of Things, that we are bound to obey whatever he in his infinite Wisdom thinks fit to require; and when we have sufficient Proofs that he lays any Commands upon us, we are indispensably oblig'd, by the Law of our Creation, to observe those Commands, though the Matter of them may seem indifferent to us, and we don't at present see the particular Reasons of them. This is a just Respect due from such dark imperfect Beings to the supreme Wisdom and Authority, to the most wise and righteous Lord of the Universe; and therefore is a Duty of natural Religion, if we take the Author's own Definition of it, that it is the Sense and Practice of those Duties that result from the Knowledge we by our Reason have of God and his Perfections, and of our selves and our own Imperfections. And if we shou'd suppose that in some particular Instances God requir'd some Things of this kind to *try us*, not as if he needed it for his own Information, which is the Turn this Author is pleas'd to give it, but to give us an Opportunity to exercise and manifest our intire Submission to him, and Acknowledgement of his Sovereignty by obeying him in Things where a Regard to his Authority and Command is the sole Reason of our Obedience; I can see nothing in this unworthy of the supreme Wisdom and Goodness. For since Obedience in such a Case, from an intire Resignation to the divine Authority, is a worthy Disposition in a reasonable Creature towards the supreme universal Lord, it cannot be prov'd to be unbecoming a wise and good God to give some Commands, the particular Design of which may be to exercise and manifest that Disposition.

Nor is there any Weight in what the Author offers against this, that “ if earthly Kings, who may
“ be deceiv'd, and for the most part are so, wou'd
“ be justly esteem'd Tyrants, if they require Things
“ of

“ of their Subjects, merely to try their Obedience,
 “ how can we think this of the omniscient, infi-
 “ nitely glorious King of Kings? p. 176*.” The
 Argument does not conclude in this Case from what
 is just and lawful in earthly Kings, to what is just
 and proper in the supreme universal Lord. Thus,
 e. g. an earthly King has no just Right to lay Afflic-
 tions upon us merely to exercise and improve our
 Virtues, our Patience, Constancy, Submission, &c.
 yet all that acknowledge a Providence must own
 that God has this Right, and does exercise it, and
 that it is wise and fit for him to do so. And if he
 may send Afflictions and Chastisements upon us,
 which are real Evils in themselves, though in the
 final Issue to our benefit, why may he not lay Com-
 mands upon us in Things which by the Supposi-
 tion are indifferent, and consequently may be done
 or omitted without any real Prejudice to us? Why
 may he not appoint some Things of this kind, that
 they may be on our parts Acts of Homage, and out-
 ward publick Acknowledgements of God’s sovereign
 Dominion over us, and of our Subjection to him, in
 doing Things in obedience to his Command, which
 otherwise we shou’d not have thought our selves
 oblig’d to do?

This Writer indeed tells us, that “ the Law of
 “ Nature leaves Men at liberty to act as they please
 “ in all indifferent Matters; and if any traditionary
 “ Law abridges this Liberty, so far ’tis contrary to
 “ that of Nature, and invades those Rights which
 “ Nature and its Author has given Mankind, p.
 “ 134†.” But certainly it is not any Part of that
 Liberty that belongs to the human Nature, that Men
 shall be freed in all indifferent Matters from the Do-
 minion of God himself, their supreme and absolute
 Lord; nor did the Author of Nature ever so far
 tie his own Hands, as to oblige himself never to
 require

require any thing of this kind; which wou'd be indeed a divesting himself of his own Sovereignty. Nor is it true that no human Legislators can give any Injunctions relating to Things which antecedently and in general are of an indifferent Nature. What are many of those Usages and Methods of Procedure and publick Forms which are settled in different Nations by human Laws, Things which in themselves absolutely consider'd are indifferent, and have no intrinsick Goodness, and might have been appointed otherwise, and yet have their Use; and if human Laws may thus determine in civil Matters, why may not God appoint the Methods and Rites relating to his own Worship?

This Gentleman indeed seems to think, that God can't have such a Power without a particular Contract between him and us; we must first give him this power before he can exercise it. He has an odd Passage to this purpose, p. 113 *. he tells us, that " the Jews being a free People, had
" a Right by the Law of Nature to chuse what
" Government and Governor they pleas'd; and
" God wou'd not act so inconsistent a Part, as to
" deprive them of any of these Rights he had given
" them by the Law of Nature; and therefore did
" not take upon him the Civil Administration of
" their Affairs, till he had obtain'd their express
" Consent; so that here he acted not as Governor
" of the Universe, but by a Power deriv'd from
" the People by virtue of the *Horeb* Covenant;
" and the Presumption is, that where there is no
" such Contract, God will not exercise such a Power;
" especially considering that tho' the Jews rejected
" God himself from reigning over them, and were
" for chusing a new King, yet he bids *Samuel* thrice
" in the same Chapter, to *hearken to the Voice of*
" *the People*, 1 Sam. 8. 4." Again, p. 197 †, he

* P. 98. † P. 174.

he says, that " God acted in giving Laws to the
" Jews, not as Governor of the Universe, but as
" King of the Jews, by virtue of the *Horeb* Cove-
" nant, which he obtain'd at his own Request."

This Gentleman here talks as if God had not a Right to lay any positive Injunctions upon the Jews, till they allow'd him to do so; as if he was oblig'd to request it of them, to grant him this Power, and cou'd not proceed till they had given it him; and as if by taking upon him the Character of the Ruler and Lord of *Israel*, he divested himself of that of Sovereign Lord of the Universe; that therefore when the Jews rejected him from being their King (as the Author tells us they did, and that God commanded *Samuel* to hearken to their Voice in it) they were free from the Obligation of those Laws; the contrary of all which is very evident. Some of their Rites were instituted before the *Horeb* Covenant, particularly the Passover, which was one of the most solemn of them all, and which was bound upon them by the express Authority of God himself, antecedently to the Contract this Author speaks of. And the Design of that Covenant was not (as he disingenuously represents it) to give God a Right to make Laws for them, which he had an undoubted Right to do, whether they consented to it or not; but as he design'd, for wise Reasons, to take them into a special Relation to himself, as his peculiar People, (and this special Relation to them was no way inconsistent with the Relation and Character he sustained, as the supreme Lord and Governor of the Universe, but subordinate to it) so it was highly proper that they shou'd, when thus separated as a select Body, openly declare their Resolutions to walk in Obedience to the Divine Laws, and bind themselves to do so by their own express Consent. But though God manifested a wonderful Condescension in his way of dealing with them,

yet

yet great Care was taken still to preserve and maintain the Regard due to his own supreme Majesty. He did not ask their Consent to the several particular Laws he enjoin'd, or demand their Approbation of them before he enjoin'd them, (as one wou'd think he ought to have done upon the Author's Scheme) as if this was necessary to ratify those Laws, and give them their binding Force; but he all along enforces the Laws he gives them by his own Divine Authority, as having, by virtue of his own supreme Dominion, an absolute uncontrouled Right to their Obedience; and therefore it is usually subjoin'd to those Laws, *I am the Lord Jehovah*, a Character belonging to him, as the supreme Lord of the Universe. And when they are said to have rejected him from being their King, (by which is meant no more than their rejecting that particular Form of Government by Judges, who were immediately rais'd up by God to judge and govern the People) they did not intend to renounce the Dominion of God himself; they look'd upon themselves to be as much oblig'd as ever by the Laws and Rites of his Appointment, as they really were; and the Law of *Moses* was as much the Rule of their Government as before. As to what the Author subjoins, that *where there is no such Contract* (as between God and the *Israelites* at *Horeb*) *the Presumption is, that God will not exercise such a Power*; that is, a Power of instituting positive Laws and Rites; 'tis evident there is no need of a particular previous Contract to give God such a Power. His Government over us is not founded in our own Consent, as if we might refuse to subject our selves to him. He is necessarily, by an original antecedent unalienable Right, our supreme and absolute Sovereign and Lord; and we are, whether we will or no, his Creatures and Subjects; he therefore has an undoubted Right, without our previous Consent, to lay whatever Com-

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mands he in his infinite Wisdom thinks proper to lay upon us, and we are under indispensable Obligations to obey; and this particularly holds in Things relating to the Rites of his own Worship, which it is evident the Author has principally in view, in this whole Dispute concerning positive Precepts. It is so far from being true, that God has no Right to lay such Injunctions upon us, that there seems to be a manifest Propriety in it, that God shou'd enjoin some Things of this kind. Some external Rites seem to be necessary in publick Worship in this present State, and nothing can be more reasonable than that God shou'd have the appointing them, as being the properest Judge of what is fit and decent in his own Worship; and because to leave it at large to human Invention is to leave a wide Door open for all manner of Superstition. And when once God has appointed such Rites, and stamp'd a Use and Significancy upon them, whether as solemn external Acts and Expressions of Homage and Adoration to him, or as Memorials of past Benefits, or outward Representations of spiritual Blessings, or as visible Pledges of his Favour to us, and visible outward Tokens of our Consent and Engagements to be his, whereby we bind our selves in a solemn manner to Obedience; they may be highly useful to the most excellent Purposes of Religion; and so though they have no absolute Goodness in their own Nature antecedently to the Divine Institution, may, when once instituted for such Purposes by God himself, be useful to excite and strengthen good Affections and Dispositions in our Minds, and to bind us more firmly to our Duty, or to the Practice of Things that are really and in their own Nature excellent.

But says the Author, " Was there any Reason
 " to deprive Men of their Liberty in indifferent
 " Things, they wou'd then cease to be indifferent,

“ p. 135 *.” And is then the whole Design of all this Gentleman’s long and labour’d Harangue on this Subject only to prove, that God will not require any thing, except he has a Reason for requiring it? This will be easily granted. And if his having a Reason for requiring Things, will prove that they are not indifferent, then there are no indifferent Things either in the Jewish or Christian Religion: for to be sure God had a Reason from his own Wisdom for enjoining them, or he wou’d not have enjoin’d them; and so all the mighty Noise he makes about positive, or, as he calls them, arbitrary Precepts, and the boasted Argument he raises from thence against Revelation, falls to the ground.

We may even at this distance assign the Reasons of many of the positive Rites and Injunctions in the Law of *Moses*. Many of them were evidently design’d to keep them a separate People, that they might not easily mingle with other Nations, and be infected with their vicious Customs; others of them were design’d as Commemorations of past Benefits and Deliverances; others of them as Types and Prefigurations of future ones, especially the Redemption by the *Messiah*, which as it was the principal Subject of the Prophecies, so it was very proper there shou’d be many Things in that Religion to typify and prefigure it, especially considering that the Jewish Religion was design’d to be introductive to that more perfect Dispensation, which the *Messiah* was to establish; and by comparing the one with the other, the great Extent of the Divine Wisdom does appear. It may be further said, that as the Jews were extremely fond of the Heathen Rites, and apt to be seduc’d with the Pomp and Show of their Worship, so it pleas’d God; in condescension to their Weakness, to institute a Religion that had pompous Rites and Ceremonies and a magnificent Temple, the

more effectually to preserve them from Idolatry, and keep them close to the Worship and Service of the true God. Add to all this, that many of the Jewish Customs and Precepts properly belong'd to them as a Commonwealth, and were appointed with very wise political Views; and when we plainly find some of them wisely order'd, we may justly suppose there were equally wise Reasons for the rest; and that they were all admirably fitted to that People and that Dispensation. Does not the Author himself lay it down as a Rule, that " 'tis the Circumstances
 " Men are under by which we are to judge of the
 " Tendency of Actions? p. 345 *." And again,
 " Should not Rules (says he) concerning Morali-
 " ty be suited to Men's particular Circumstances,
 " &c. is not this the Design of the municipal Laws
 " of every Country? p. 344 †." I ask therefore, supposing God gave any Laws to the Jews at all, should they not be suited to their particular Circumstances? Was not this the Part of a wise Legislator? If therefore, as they were circumstanc'd, those Laws tended to their Benefit, to preserve them from the Pollutions of the Heathens, and keep them close to the Worship of the true God, if they were admirably adapted to the particular State and Circumstances of that People and Polity, then they were just and good, even by our Author's own Rule, and wisely contriv'd; and it wou'd be an inexcusable Rashness at this Distance to pronounce a hasty Censure upon Laws, of which we do not know the Occasions and Circumstances which might make them proper and even necessary at that Time, and for that People. But because there are some of the Jewish Rites, which the Author particularly endeavours to expose as absurd and unworthy of God, particularly Circumcision and Sacrifices, I shall take
 this

* P. 312. † P. 311.

this Occasion to consider what he offers concerning them, that I may not return again to this Subject.

Circumcision he represents as a cruel Rite, not to be perform'd *without extreme Danger as well as Anguish*, and which therefore cou'd not reasonably be suppos'd a *religious Duty, acceptable to a good and gracious God*, p. 90 *. One wou'd think, by his way of representing it, that the Children every time they were circumcis'd run the utmost Hazard of their Lives, and that great Numbers of 'em died of it; which we don't find to have been the Case either formerly or now, or that it was of any Inconvenience to their bodily Health or Strength; nor did the Jews themselves make any such Complaints of it as this Gentleman makes for them. Instead of esteeming it so cruel a Hardship, they counted it their Privilege and Glory. The general Design of Circumcision was to separate them to God, as a People in a peculiar manner devoted to him, and from whom the *Messiah* was to spring. God so order'd it, that they might carry about them in their Bodies a constant Memorial of their Obligations. Nor can it be prov'd, that God cannot, when it is for valuable Ends, require any thing that may occasion some present Trouble and Uneasiness in the Flesh; and this particular Rite seems to be fix'd upon for this End, among others, to remind them of the Obligation they were under to mortify the Flesh with its corrupt Affections and Lusts, to put off the old Man with his Deeds, (to use the Apostle's Expressions) and subdue their sinful Appetites and Passions; a Work ungrateful to corrupt Nature, and which yet must be perform'd, though it may cost Pain and Trouble to do it. It is evident from many Passages in the Old Testament, that the outward Circumcision was principally design'd to lead their Thoughts to that Circumcision of the Heart,

* P. 77.

as it is call'd; and they are often put in mind that the former wou'd be of no avail to their Acceptance to God without the latter. See for this purpose *Deut. 10. 16. Deut. 30. 6. Jer. 4. 4. Rom. 2. 29.*

Our Author also finds fault with Sacrifices, which he represents as a very absurd and senseless Superstition, "as if God was of so cruel a nature, as to
 " Be delighted with the butchering of innocent
 " Animals, and that the Stench of Burnt-Flesh
 " shou'd be such a sweet-smelling Savour in his
 " Nostrils, as to atone for the Wickedness of Men;
 " and wicked no doubt they were, when they had
 " such an Atonement at hand." He resolves the Original of Sacrifices into the Artifices of the Priests, "who shar'd with their Gods, and reserv'd the best
 " bits for themselves;" and taught the People, that
 " it was necessary some Part of the Flesh of Ani-
 " mals was to be burnt to feed the hungry Nostrils
 " of the Deity, delighted with the sweet Savour of
 " burnt Flesh, p. 91, 92*.

It wou'd indeed be a very senseless Superstition, if it were as this Writer thinks fit to represent it. But may not a juster Account be given of the End and Design of Sacrifices? If Men can without Cruelty (as I suppose our Author will easily grant, since he makes himself so merry with those that scruple eating Blood) *butcher innocent Animals* for their own Use, I see not how it cou'd be suppos'd a Cruelty in God (as this Gentleman insinuates) to require that Animals shou'd be offer'd as a publick Act of Homage, or Rite of Acknowledgement to the great Ruler of the World, whereby Men publickly recogniz'd his absolute Dominion over them, and Propriety in them and theirs, devoting a Part to him to whose Bounty they ow'd their all. The Author indeed calls this an *ungrateful throwing back the Gifts of God upon the Donor*, p. 91. and I wou'd
 faint

* P. 78, 79.

tain know what other way we have of serving God, but to give him of his own? This Gentleman talks, as if we cou'd never be said to worship God acceptably, except we cou'd lay an Obligation on him, by giving him something which he had not before.

As to the Sacrifices of Expiation, they were design'd to put Men in mind, by the slaughtering of the Victim, of the Death and Punishment they themselves had incurr'd and deserv'd by their Sins, and to keep alive upon their Minds a Sense of the divine Justice, and at the same time to be a visible Pledge of his Mercy and Willingness to be reconcil'd. And accordingly the Sacrifices amongst the Jews were to be accompanied with Prayer and Confession of their Sins; so that by this Rite they publickly acknowledg'd their own Guilt and Demerit, the Sense they had of the divine Justice, and at the same time their Hope and Confidence in the divine Mercy. And it is to be consider'd further, that the Scripture teaches us to regard these Sacrifices as the Pledges, the Types and Prefigurations of that great Atonement and Propitiation that was to be offer'd in the Fulness of Time for the Sins of the World. And on Supposition that there was a Saviour promis'd from the Beginning, who was to suffer and die for our Sins, and yet for wise Reasons was not actually to appear till many Ages after, why might it not be agreeable to the divine Wisdom to institute Sacrifices to continue till his Coming, the better to preserve upon Men's Minds a Sense of God's Justice and Mercy too, and of the Necessity of an Atonement or Propitiation for Sin?

From this Account of the Use and Design of Sacrifices, it does not appear to be so foolish a Rite as this Gentleman pretends; the Absurdity of which arises wholly from the gross and coarse Ideas under which he chuses to represent it, as if Sacrifices were offer'd only to *feed the hungry Nostrils of the Deity,*

d lighted with the Savour of burnt Flesh. It was impossible for the Jews to entertain such a Notion, if they govern'd themselves by the sacred Writings, which every where abound with the most noble and sublime Descriptions of the Deity, his Spirituality, Immenfity, All-fufficiency, &c. Besides which, there are many exprefs and formal Passages, design'd as it were on purpose to prevent such gross Conceptions. Nothing can be fuller to this purpose than the 50th Psalm, v. 9, 10, 11, 12, 13. *If. 1. 11, 12, 13.* Effectual Care is taken to prevent their imagining that any of these Things were, in themselves consider'd, and by any Virtue of their own, fufficient to recommend them to God, and expiate the Guilt of Sin. See further to this purpose, *Pf. 40. 6. 51. 16, 19. Prov. 15. 8. Jer. 6. 19, 20. Amos 5. 21, 22.* It appears therefore, that there was nothing in the Institution of Sacrifices to encourage Sin, as if they might be *as wicked as they pleas'd, having such an Atonement at hand*, as this Writer intimates. They were fufficiently inform'd, that these Sacrifices wou'd be of no avail without Repentance and new Obedience, though to the sincere and truly penitent they were the visible Pledges of God's pardoning Mercy.

As to the positive Rites of Christianity they are few and simple, of noble Use and Significancy, and easily accounted for. Baptism is a sacred Rite, whereby Persons are solemnly dedicated and devoted to God, and visibly entred among Christ's Disciples, and brought under Engagements to Obedience. It is a very proper Symbol to represent that inward Purity that is requir'd of all Christ's sincere Disciples, and to be a Representation and Pledge of that Pardon of Sins that shall be conferr'd upon them. Finally, it is design'd to bind us to the Observation of the Christian Covenant, and consequently if the Duties of that Covenant are unquestionably pure and excellent, as they certainly are, then this Rite, instead

stead of diverting us from Morality, has an excellent Tendency to promote the Practice of Righteousness. The same may be said of the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper. It is design'd for a Confirmation of the Christian Covenant; and besides this, has a particular Reference to the Sufferings and Death of Christ, of which it is a Commemoration. And supposing what the Scriptures relate concerning Christ to be true, that he is the great Saviour of the World, and that he suffer'd and died to obtain eternal Redemption for us; supposing, I say, this to be true, (and it must be suppos'd in the present Question, when we are judging of the Reasonableness of such an Institution) then certainly it might be very agreeable to the divine Wisdom to appoint a sacred Rite, the particular Design of which was to keep up the grateful lively Remembrance of such glorious Benefits, and to stir up the warm Emotions of Love to God and the Redeemer in our Hearts.

And to suppose that the instituting only such Rites as these, which at least are harmless, but are really beneficial, shou'd have such a strange Effect, as to render all other Things that can be said for Christianity ineffectual, is contrary to the common Sense and Reason of Mankind. For if the other Proofs brought for the Christian Religion be true, the having such positive Rites cannot alone ever prove it to be false.

Our Author indeed affirms, that “there's nothing of a mutable Nature, if once esteem'd immutably fix'd by God, but must sometimes prove prejudicial to the End 'twas intended to promote, especially in a Religion design'd to extend over the World, as well as to last to the End of it, p. 109 *.” But I don't see any thing in the Nature of the Christian Sacraments, but what may be generally and perpetually observ'd; nor that they
can

* P. 95.

can ever become prejudicial to the Ends for which they were appointed, whilst Men observe them in the Manner and for the Purposes for which they were originally instituted; and if they do not, the Fault is not in the Institutions themselves, but in those that do not keep close to the divine Appointment. Indeed the Jewish Ceremonies were many of them of such a Nature, that they cou'd not be generally and perpetually observ'd; and accordingly it is plain they were never design'd by God for universal Observation, nor to be continued throughout all Ages; as appears in that they were particularly accommodated to that Time and Nation, and were for the most part, by their original Institution, confin'd to the Land of *Canaan*, and to the Tabernacle or Temple there. And we may be sure a wise and good God will take care not to establish any positive Institutions by a perpetual Law or Constitution, but what may be perpetually observ'd.

It might be thought unnecessary to add any thing further on this Subject of positive Precepts; but because it is a Point the Author labours with great Art, I shall add some further Remarks upon what he offers on this Head.

And one Remark I wou'd make is this; That many of his Arguments are nothing else but a plain begging of the Question; as when he often repeats it, that *Things good and evil* (that is, Things which are morally so) *are the only Things which God can command or forbid, or to which the Commands of a Being of infinite Wisdom and Goodness can extend:* and when he talks with so much Pomp of the *eternal Reason and Nature of Things*, and that this is *the Foundation and Measure of God's Dominion*, and thence infers, that nothing can be a divine Law, but what is obligatory from the very Nature of the Thing; what is all this, which is the Substance of what he advances on this Subject in his
last

last Chapter, but poorly to beg the Question, and take for granted the Thing which is in Debate? Even with respect to Things in their own nature obligatory, though they may be fit and reasonable in themselves, yet that which properly makes them a divine Law, is the Authority of God the supreme Legislator; and therefore, if there were no Deity there cou'd be no divine Law; and this Authority of God may bind some Things upon us, which of themselves, and without such a Command, wou'd not be obligatory. Nor does the Author prove the contrary, except we must take strong Assertions for Proofs. He has indeed a great deal to shew, that God cannot act contrary to the eternal Reason and Nature of Things, or to the Relations between him and us, but he never proves, that it is contrary to the Reason of Things or to the Relation between God, consider'd as the supreme Lord and Governor of the World, and us as his Creatures and Subjects, for God to require Things of a positive Nature; on the contrary, it is easy to shew, that his Right to require such Things, and our Obligation to obey them, is founded in the very Nature and Reason of Things, (to use the Author's Expressions) or necessarily results from the Relations between God and us. When this Writer tells us, that "the Reason
" of Things and the divine Commands are insepa-
" rable, but that it is the Fitness of Things which
" makes it a Divine Law, p. 357 *. If he speaks of a moral Fitness, and designs to signify that nothing but what is in its own Nature morally good can be a Divine Law, this is the very Point he ought to prove, and not (as in this and many other Passages) securely take it for granted. But if all the Meaning of such Assertions as these be only, that God commands nothing but what he himself has just and wise Reasons for commanding, and requires nothing but what he sees to be fit and reasonable

* P. 323.

sonable for him to require; I own it, but then it may be fit and reasonable, on many accounts, for him to require some Things, which taken in general and abstractedly, seem to be of an indifferent Nature.

The Author indeed in this whole Dispute concerning positive Precepts, all along confounds *positive* and *arbitrary* Precepts; and by arbitrary Precepts he means Precepts for which there is no Reason at all. He represents all those that hold there are any positive Divine Precepts in Religion, as maintaining that God acts by *mere Will and Arbitrariness*, that is, by mere unreasonable Will and Pleasure, without any valuable End or Reason; and that he gives *arbitrary Laws*, that is, Laws which he has no Reason for giving. But this is very unfair. We freely acknowledge, that he never does or requires any thing but what his own infinite Wisdom sees it fit and reasonable for him to do and to require, and that he always does that which, all Circumstances consider'd, is best upon the whole and fittest to be done; and when he gives positive Precepts, it is because as Matters are circumstanc'd, he sees it fit and proper to do so, of which certainly he is the best Judge. And therefore the greatest part of the Author's reasoning on this Subject is intirely lost and impertinent, which proceeds upon the Supposition, that there is no Reason at all for laying such positive Injunctions upon us; that they have *no relation at all to the Honour of God, and to the Good of Mankind*; that they are mere *useless Observances*. But this is what he ought to prove, that Things which in general and antecedently are indifferent, can never be of any Use, or answer any valuable Purposes, or be subservient to the promoting Things which are in their own Nature excellent: The contrary to which has been shewn.

When he argues, that “ whatsoever is in it self
“ indifferent, must be so to an all-wise God, who
“ judges

“ judges of Things as they are:” And that
“ Things which are of no Value in themselves,
“ can be no Motives to an all-wise Being to re-
“ ward or punish his Children, p. 122 *.” It is
easy to reply, that Things which in general and ab-
stractedly consider’d are of no Value, and have no
absolute Goodness of their own, may yet be so cir-
cumstanc’d, that consider’d in the Manner and for
the Ends for which they are injoin’d, they may be
highly useful; and the injoining them may in such
Cases answer many valuable Ends, and then sup-
posing that a wise God sees it proper to injoin them,
he may justly punish the Neglect of them. For
the not observing them when he requires it, is re-
ally an Immorality, and argues a Contempt of the
Divine Wisdom and Authority, and is therefore
justly punishable; and the observing these Things
in the Manner and for the Ends for which God re-
quires them, when done in Obedience to his Au-
thority, and from a hearty Resignation to his Wis-
dom and Sovereignty, may be an acceptable Act
of Obedience, and argue an excellent Disposition of
Mind, and as such may be rewardable. But as to
the Case he puts of a Person’s observing *the whole
Law of Nature*, and yet being *punish’d eternally for
not observing such Things as these*, p. 125 †. This
is an extravagant Supposition, that ought not to
be made. Nobody pretends that positive Rites are
obligatory on those, to whom they never were made
known. And it can never be suppos’d, that a
Man that observes the whole Law of Nature, and
who therefore must be suppos’d to have the pro-
foundest Submission and Veneration for the Deity,
will refuse to observe a positive Rite, on Supposi-
tion that he knows that God requires it.

Our Author frequently represents positive Pre-
cepts as a grievous and insupportable Yoke, and
declaims

* P. 106. † P. 109.

declaims pathetically on this Subject. He tells us, that "the whole of human Liberty consists in
 " Men's acting as they think fit in indifferent Mat-
 " ters, where no one is injur'd:" And that "Men's
 " Happiness depends on their Liberty in all such
 " Things; and that Men are more or less miserable,
 " according as they are more or less depriv'd of
 " this Liberty, especially in Matters of Religion,
 " wherein they ought to be most free, p. 134, 135*."
 I must own I think it a very odd Account which this Gentleman here gives of human Happiness, that it depends wholly upon their Liberty in indifferent Things, that is, upon their Liberty of doing or omitting Things which according to his Notion are good for nothing, and if done or omitted are of no service at all. But to pass this by, it will be easily allow'd, that Men ought to be free in Matters of Religion; but this Freedom of Men in Matters of Religion does not signify that they must be absolutely free from the Injunctions of God himself. We may then be said to be free in Religion, when we are at liberty to serve God and to obey his Injunctions freely according to our Consciences, without the Constraint of human Impositions. But the Freedom he refers to, that is, Men's being left wholly to themselves, without any Divine Direction or Appointment in religious Rites of Worship, wou'd be far from being an Advantage in the present State of Mankind. But he charges his Adversaries with supposing, "that God, who had the
 " Goodness for a long time not to confine Man-
 " kind to any indifferent Things, yet at length
 " chang'd his Mind, and repented of this great
 " Goodness, and arbitrarily depriv'd, they will not
 " say all Mankind, but no small Number, of their
 " Liberty, and requir'd of them the Belief of cer-
 " tain useless Speculations, and the Practice of cer-
 " tain

tain indifferent Things, under the severest Penalties, p. 130 *.” As to what he calls *useless Speculations*, there are no such Things in the Christian Religion. All the Articles we are requir’d to believe, are noble and excellent in their Tendency, and have a happy Influence, where they are firmly believ’d and seriously consider’d, to excite and confirm good Dispositions in us. But to pass this by at present, I observe that this Gentleman takes it for granted here, as in several other Passages, particularly p. 115. that the Religion of Mankind from the Beginning, and for many Ages, was without any positive Rites at all; which is to take for granted a Thing which he knows is denied; since all that own the Authority of the Scriptures, must believe that there were things of a positive nature requir’d from the Beginning. Nor can any Time be assign’d when the Religion of Mankind was absolutely without any positive Rites at all. Never was there any Nation that had any publick Worship, but what had also some positive Rites in their Religion, which they receiv’d, or believ’d they receiv’d from God; so that in this the Author has the Sense of all Mankind against him. But supposing there had been a Time when there were no positive Precepts requir’d at all, wou’d this prove that there cou’d never be any requir’d or instituted afterward? Can God never alter his Methods of Proceeding towards Mankind, when the Change in their Circumstances makes such an Alteration proper? Cannot he accommodate his Laws and Injunctions to their Circumstances (which by the Author’s own Acknowledgement is an Instance of great Goodness, yea and of Wisdom too) but he must be charg’d with *changing his Mind, and repenting of his Goodness*? Supposing that God saw it necessary even for preserving the greater Matters of Religion, for
main-

maintaining his Worship, for restraining Men from Idolatry, to institute outward Rites and Ceremonies, which were not instituted before, wou'd this in such Circumstances be any Want of Goodness, and not rather a remarkable Instance of his gracious Condescension for their Benefit? Or wou'd it be a greater Goodness in God to leave Men wholly to their own Inventions and Imaginations in appointing religious Rites, (the sad Effects of which so visibly appear'd in the Heathen World) than himself to prescribe the Rites of his own Worship? What this Author so tragically represents as an *arbitrarily depriving Men of their Liberty* is in other Words only instituting sacred Rites for the valuable Purposes of Religion, and instead of being a Hardship upon them is a signal Advantage. Thus it was a great Advantage to the Jews to have sacred Rites of God's own Appointment. These Rites, however burdensome they might seem, were very useful to them as they were circumstanc'd, and tended to keep them free from the Idolatries of the Heathens, and the many barbarous, impure and cruel Rites of their Worship. And as to Christians, the positive Rites requir'd in the Gospel are so few, so easy of Observation, so comfortable and beneficial in their Tendency, that whatever this Gentleman thinks, the best of Christians have been so far from regarding them as a grievous Yoke, that they have ever esteem'd it their great Privilege to observe them, and have been very thankful for them, and wou'd not be without the Satisfaction they yield. Upon the whole, if God is pleas'd to direct us in the Rites of his own Worship, and if, in condescension to our Infirmities, he institutes some outward sensible Signs, to be the Symbols of spiritual Benefits, and the visible Pledges of his Favour, and to be Helps for exciting good Affections in us; this, instead of being complain'd of as a Hardship, shou'd be

he acknowledg'd as a Benefit, and instead of charging him with Tyranny, we shou'd admire his Condescension and Goodness.

The Author seems aware of this, and objects to himself, p. 172 *. that " sensible Things make a
" deeper Impression on the Minds of the common
" People than Words, and therefore the using symbolical Representations being for the advantage of
" Religion, why may they not be ordain'd of God?" He answers, that " if we must have recourse to
" Words to explain the Signification of such Symbols, 'tis plain they are arbitrary Marks, and not
" being capable of expressing Things more fully
" than Words, are wholly needless; Words themselves being but arbitrary Signs, to multiply such
" Signs needlessly wou'd be very absurd."

This Argument of the Author's tends equally to prove, that all Symbols in political or civil Matters are absurd, and so arraigns the Wisdom and the Customs of all Nations. Why shou'd a Seal be added to confirm a Writing, since it is an arbitrary Mark, and not being able to express Things more fully than Words, is wholly needless? But notwithstanding what this Gentleman offers, it can't be denied that sensible Signs, or symbolical Representations, accompanied with Words, often make a much stronger Impression than Words alone wou'd do, and tend more to strike and affect the Mind, and excite more lively Images; and this being so, why may it not be agreeable to the Wisdom and Goodness of God to accommodate himself to the human Nature by instituting some such symbolical Rites?

But he urges, p. 173 †. that " as to sensible
" Things making a deeper Impression on the common People, that is a just Reason against their
" Use in Religion; because the Vulgar, who generally

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" nerally

* P. 152. † P. 152, 153.

“ nerally look no further than Externals, conceive
 “ in them I know not what internal Holiness, and
 “ think such symbolical Representations as necessary
 “ as the Things represented by them.” He adds,
 that “ the chief Cause of the *Egyptians* falling into
 “ grosser Idolatries than other less knowing Nations,
 “ was owing to the Use of Hieroglyphicks in their
 “ religious Worship; and that the Popish Idolatry
 “ was introduc’d under Pretence of sensible Repre-
 “ sentations to excite People’s Devotions.”

But since Men are so fond of symbolical Representations, which have obtain’d more or less in all Nations, and since they have so great a Tendency to work upon us in this present State, this shews how much adapted this way is to the Nature of Man; and therefore it is an Instance of great Goodness in God, that he hath appointed some Things of this kind to be used in his Worship. And indeed the most effectual way that cou’d be suppos’d, to prevent the wrong Use that might be made of these Things, was for God to take the appointing of them into his own hands. And if Men had kept close to his Appointment, if they had adher’d to the Simplicity of the Divine Institutions, there would have been no Danger of Idolatry; no Mischief, but a great deal of Comfort and Advantage would have flow’d from those symbolical Representations.

But our Author farther argues, that if any positive things be admitted at all, it will endanger Religion. “ For if People are once brought to be-
 “ lieve they are good for any thing, they will be
 “ apt to believe they are good for all things, and
 “ to lay a greater Stress upon them than their Na-
 “ ture will bear; they will think, by the Observance
 “ of such Things as these, to compound with Hea-
 “ ven for Immoralities. Nothing therefore can be
 “ of worse consequence than to depreciate Morality,
 “ by mixing Things of an indifferent Nature with
 “ it,

" it, p. 141, 150 *." He frequently intimates, that the Original of all Superstition is the supposing any positive Rites of Divine Institution in Religion. He charges this also as the unhappy Source of all those Contentions, Persecutions, endless Quarrels about indifferent Things, which have disturb'd the World in all Ages. He declaims largely on this Subject in his tenth and eleventh Chapters.

It will easily be granted, that People have often made a very wrong Use of positive Things; many have thought, by ritual Observances, to compound for Immoralities. And have not many also suppos'd, that by the Observance of one moral Precept, such as Charity to the Poor, they might compound for the Violation of others equally necessary? But does this prove, that therefore that moral Precept ought not to have been given? Many have been apt to place a great Part of their Religion in outward Forms and Rites, and many Quarrels and Contentions there have been about such Things as these. But what Method does this Gentleman propose to hinder it? It is to leave all outward Matters relating to Religion and divine Worship wholly to human Discretion. He tells us, that " it is necessary that " the People shou'd be left at liberty to chuse those " Means, that their Reason tells them may be most " proper for obtaining the End, p. 105, 110." And that " human Discretion is left at liberty in these " Things, to judge what is fit or not fit to be ob- " serv'd, p. 113." And it is the Title of his 10th Chapter, that " God leaves those Things that can " only be consider'd as Means (and as such are in " their own Nature mutable) to human Discretion, " to determine as it thinks most conducing to those " things which are in their own Nature obligatory."

This then is the Method he prescribes for destroying Superstition, to leave Mankind wholly to their own Discretion, in Matters relating to Di-

vine Worship. But if we must judge by Fact, this Method is not very proper to answer the Intention. What Effect had the Prudence and Discretion of the Heathen Law-givers, Men admir'd for their Wisdom? Was it not to establish a Multitude of idolatrous Rites, that destroy'd the Purity of Religion? Can a People be nam'd who have not fallen into the most absurd Superstitions, when left merely to their own Discretion, without the Guidance of Divine Revelation in Matters of Religion? This Author himself owns, that it is the Voice of Nature that God must be publicly worshipp'd, but he wou'd have the appointing all the Rites of the Divine Worship left to Men themselves. Let us suppose then, that they shou'd think proper to make use of symbolical Rites in Divine Worship, (and 'tis certain in Fact, that this has been the general Sentiment of Mankind in all Ages) all the Mischiefs he complains of wou'd follow; they wou'd by Use become sacred and venerable; the People wou'd contract a superstitious Veneration for them, as they usually have for the Traditions of their Fathers; they wou'd be apt to place Religion in them; add to this, that they wou'd be in much greater danger on such a Supposition of running into Idolatry, than if they were confin'd to the Rites of God's own Appointment. And as human Fancy and Imagination is very fruitful, they would multiply such Rites, till they *swell'd to that Bulk* (to use the Author's Expressions) *as to oppress and stifle true Religion by their Number and Weight.*

The best Remedy that can be propos'd against these Mischiefs, is for God to appoint the Rites of his own Worship, and for Men to adhere closely to the Divine Institutions. And if they govern'd themselves by the Word of God, using those Rites that are there instituted, and for those Purposes for which they are there appointed, Superstition wou'd be

be effectually prevented. They might in that Case think such positive Institutions *good for something*, viz. for the Purposes for which they were instituted, and yet would not think them *good for all Things*, or that they can compound for Immoralities.

The Jewish Religion had a great Variety of Rites and Ceremonies; but it appears from many Passages in the Sacred Writings, that great Care was taken to prevent the People's imagining that all Religion consisted in these Things, or that the mere outward Performance of them wou'd be sufficient to recommend them to the Divine Favour. And as to the New Testament, this Writer himself acknowledges, and endeavours to shew, p. 429, 430 *. that it every where inculcates the absolute Necessity of Righteousness and moral Goodness, without which no ceremonious Observances will be of any avail to our Acceptance with God.

But though the whole or principal Part of Religion does not consist in these Things, it does not follow, that they cannot be admitted into Religion at all, or make any Part of it. For on Supposition that God requires them, to observe them in obedience to his Authority, even though we did not distinctly see the Reason of them, (which yet is not the Case, with respect to the positive Rites of Christianity, the Reasons and Uses of which are obvious and excellent) wou'd argue good Dispositions, and might be counted very properly an Act of Religion, if Obedience to God be so. And he that does this, acts a reasonable Part. Superstition does not consist in observing the Rites which God hath injoin'd, and in the Manner and for the Purposes for which he hath injoin'd them; nor was any Man ever superstitious by keeping close to the Divine Institutions, and by laying that Stress upon them which

he directs us in his Word to lay upon them. Religion does indeed (as this Gentleman frequently tells us) *consist in imitating the Perfections of God*, and he thinks that to observe any such positive Rites is not to *imitate any of the divine Perfections*, p. 123 *. but then this alone is not an adequate Notion of Religion; it consists also in obeying his Commands, in a Subjection to his Authority, and in a Resignation to his Will, and in an Observance of whatsoever he is pleas'd to appoint. We must not, under pretence of being like God, and imitating his Perfections, pretend like him to be free from the Injunctions of any Superior.

It seems very plausible, and for the Honour of God and Religion, to say, "there is nothing in a Religion that comes from God, but what is most excellent." But if he means by *most excellent*, what is of a moral Nature, and has in itself the highest degree of internal Excellency, this is to take for granted, what he ought to prove. There may be Things in Religion, which though abstractly and in themselves consider'd, they are not of an equal Degree of Excellency, with others, yet are proper in their Places, and have a subservient Excellency or Aptness to promote the practice of the most excellent; and these also may very justly make a Part of Religion that comes from God. But the Author urges, "Can such things as have no Worth or Excellency in them, contribute to the Worth or Excellency of Religion? If they cou'd, the more they abounded, the more excellent wou'd Religion be; whereas the Excellency of the Christian Religion is acknowledg'd to consist in this, that it commands but few of these Things; and he thinks those Men ridiculous, who whilst they commend the Christian Religion as purely spiritual, in opposition to the carnal Religion of the Jews, yet at
" the

“ the same time contend it has some Ordinances,
“ as little spiritual as any the Jews had, and put a
“ greater Stress upon them, than ever the Jews did
“ on any of theirs ; and he observes, that in Heaven
“ there’s no room for arbitrary (by which he means
positive) “ Precepts, to incumber that moral Good-
“ ness which is the sole Business of the Blessed
“ above, p. 123, 124 *.

It will easily be granted, that every Religion that comes from God, must be fitted to promote the Ends for which it is design’d ; and that there can be nothing in such a Religion, but what divine Wisdom sees proper, and God is certainly the best Judge of what is so ; but I deny that every Religion that comes from God, must immediately have the highest possible Degree of Excellency and Perfection, if by perfect and excellent be meant what is absolutely so, and not as relative to the Ends for which it is given, and to the Condition and Circumstances of those to whom it is prescrib’d. The Religion of Men may be different, in some respects, from that of Angels, less perfect in itself, but more suited to them ; and the Religion of Men on Earth may differ from that of the Saints in Heaven, less perfect absolutely consider’d, and yet more agreeable to their present Condition and Circumstances ; there may be some Things in the Religion of fallen Creatures wisely adapted to their Circumstances and Infirmities, which wou’d not have been so proper or necessary in the Religion of innocent ones ; and the Author himself ought not to find fault with this, since he lays it down as his great Rule, that the Goodness or Fitness of Things ought to be judg’d of by the Circumstances Men are under. Those Things therefore, which abstractly consider’d have no innate Worth or Excellency in them, may yet be so circumstanc’d, as to be useful to promote the main

Ends of Religion. And in this respect the Jewish Religion, though in itself less perfect than the Christian, might be very well fitted to the Circumstances of that Time and Nation. It is justly mention'd as an Excellency of the Christian Religion above the Jewish, that it has less of outward Ceremonies; but it does not follow, that therefore those Ceremonies were not proper for the Time in which they were instituted: though as the Reason and End of them ceas'd at Christ's Coming, so the Christian Religion was freed from them; yet divine Wisdom has not thought fit that it should be intirely free from all positive Rites. So that here we may observe a beautiful Gradation. The more imperfect Jewish Dispensation gave way to the Christian; as the Christian shall to that in Heaven, when we shall be put in full possession of the glorious Things themselves, and therefore shall have no need of symbolical Rites to be the Signs and Pledges of spiritual Benefits as here. Though therefore this Author wou'd be thought to honour Christianity, by pretending that it must be *wholly spiritual like its Author*, p. 124 *. If by *wholly spiritual* he means without any positive Rites or Sacraments, Christianity might indeed appear more spiritual without them, but it wou'd be less fitted to answer the End, less suited to the State of the Church on Earth, and wou'd want some valuable Helps and Incitements to Duty.

There is one Argument behind, which for the Extraordinariness of it I cannot but take notice of; and that is, p. 356 †. where he argues, that “ since “ God has given us Faculties to distinguish between “ Good and Evil, this supposes these are the only “ Things he commands and forbids; because otherwise those excellent Faculties God has given us “ wou'd enable us to know but Part of the Will of “ God.” As far as I am capable to understand this Argument, it runs thus: That our Faculties were given

given us only to distinguish between Things morally good and evil, and therefore our Faculties will not enable us to understand any thing but what is so. And if he cou'd prove this, he might save himself any further Trouble ; for in vain are Commands given us which we have no Faculties to discern, and which it is impossible for us to know, though God gave them to us. But what strange Trifling is this ? We cou'd not indeed know that God gave positive Precepts, or what those Precepts are, except God reveal'd them to us ; but on Supposition of his revealing them to us, our Faculties will as well enable us to know them as any Part of our Duty ; they are not obligatory till made known, but they are as capable of being made known or reveal'd as any Commands whatsoever.

Our Author concludes his eleventh Chapter with a Citation from *Lord Shaftesbury*, that “ to believe
“ the governing Mind or Minds not absolutely and
“ necessarily good, nor confin'd to what is best, but
“ capable of acting by mere Will and Fancy, is to
“ be a Demonist.” 'Tis plain he all along charges those that suppose God to injoin any positive Institutions in Religion, with supposing God to act arbitrarily, according to mere Will and Fancy ; so that we have here the goodly Character he compliments them with, they are Demonists. How unjust this Charge is, has been sufficiently shewn. If to say, that God never does any thing by mere unreasonable Will and Pleasure, or without a wise Reason known to himself, though we may not be able always distinctly to assign the Reasons upon which he proceeds ; if to say that he has a Right to require some Things, which absolutely and abstractly consider'd, are not morally good or evil, yet as they are circumstanc'd, may be very useful and beneficial, even for the promoting the Practice of those Things that are unquestionably good and excellent ; if to say that accordingly

Accordingly he hath actually requir'd some such Things; if this be Demonism, then those that plead for positive Institutions in Religion may pass for Demonists. But what Character do those deserve, that are for limiting the sovereign Lord of the Universe, so that it is not in his power to require of his Creatures what an earthly Parent or Master may require of his Child or Servant? Who hold that God has not a Right to require any thing of his Creatures, nor are they oblig'd to obey him, any further than they know the precise Reason of that Command or Injunction? That he not only cannot require any thing from them that carries the least Hardship, but that he cannot command them even in indifferent Matters, or require any thing from them in any Instance whatsoever, any further than their own Interest is concern'd? That they are capable of judging, in all Instances, what he can or cannot command; that is, in other Words, that they are as wise and as knowing as he? These are either Principles of the Author's, or Conclusions that seem to me to flow naturally from his Principles.



C H A P. V.

That the Law of Nature is not so clear to all Mankind, as to render an external Revelation useless; and that even with respect to those Principles and Duties of the Law of Nature, which absolutely speaking are discoverable by human Reason, a Revelation may be of great Use, to give a clearer and more certain Knowledge of them than the Bulk of Mankind would have without it.

I Have hitherto consider'd what the Author offers to prove the absolute Perfection of the original Law of Nature given to Mankind at the Beginning; that

that is, that it was so perfect that nothing could ever possibly be added to it; and that therefore no Revelation could possibly ever discover any thing but what was a Part of that original Law; nor could God ever by any subsequent Law require any thing of Man but what he required at the Beginning of the Creation. In opposition to this, it has been shewn, that God may require Things afterwards, which he did not actually require at the Beginning; and that supposing an Alteration in the Circumstances of Mankind, it may be highly agreeable to his Wisdom and Goodness to do so; and that therefore this Argument drawn from the supposed absolute Perfection of the Law of Nature incapable of any Additions, to prove that there could be no subsequent Revelation, is good for nothing.

Let us now consider what he offers on the Head of the Clearness of the Law of Nature. Having, as he supposes, proved that the Law of Nature is so absolutely perfect, that nothing could ever be added to it, he next endeavours to shew, that this Law of Nature is so clear and obvious, in all its Extent, to all Mankind, that no external Revelation can make it clearer than it is already. If indeed both these Principles be allow'd him, the Conclusion naturally follows, that therefore God never gave any external Revelation at all, since upon such a View of Things it must be entirely useless. But if either of these Suppositions be false, the Conclusion fails. For on the one hand, if it may seem fit to the Divine Wisdom to make some Additions to that original Law given to Mankind in the Beginning, then though we should allow that original Law to be sufficiently clear and obvious to all Mankind, yet an external Revelation might be useful, to let us know what are those Additions which it has pleased God for wise Ends to make to that original Law; and on the other hand, though it should be supposed, that the
original

original Law given to Man in the Beginning was incapable of any Additions, yet if by some means or other there be a Darkness and Corruption on Mankind, that hinders them from a clear Knowledge of that Law, an external Revelation may be of great Use to set it in a clearer Light, when obscured and defaced through the Ignorance, Corruption and Prejudices of Mankind. This is what I shall now particularly consider.

It has been already observed, that if we take the Law of Nature in that vast comprehensive Sense in which the Author understands it, as adequate to the whole Reason and Nature of Things; as a Law to God himself, and to all reasonable Beings throughout the Universe, comprehending every thing that he can require, and every thing that it is fit for all Orders of intelligent Beings to do in every Instance, it would be a very extravagant Thing to say, that the Law of Nature in this extensive Sense is so very clear and obvious to all Mankind, that every Man, even he that can't read his Mother-Tongue, (to use our Author's Expressions) may easily by himself understand it in all its Extent. Nor can I be persuaded that this Gentleman himself cou'd really believe it. And yet his Scheme, as he has dress'd it up, goes upon this Supposition. For if that Law of Nature, which he affirms to be so absolutely perfect that nothing cou'd possibly be added to it, and which he makes to take in every thing that is founded in the Nature of Things, if this be not the same with that Law of Nature, which he supposes to be clear and obvious to all Mankind, even those of the meanest Capacity, 'tis evident that the Connection of his Scheme is broken, and the whole Fabrick he has erected upon it falls to the ground. I might therefore fix my Foot here, and content myself with barely proposing it to the Reader, whether every Man can take in *the whole Scheme and*

State and Order of Things; a Thing which this Writer himself tells us, he knows no Man that pretends to do, p. 384 *.

The Author therefore must be oblig'd to change his Scheme. After all the magnificent Things he has said of the Law of Nature, and its absolute Perfection, to which nothing can possibly be added, he must now, when he sets himself to shew that it is clear to all Mankind, be oblig'd to take it in a more limited Sense. And here again it is very hard to know, under what precise Idea we are to regard that Law of Nature, the Clearness of which he asserts. He defines the Religion of Nature to be *the Sense and Practice of those Duties which result from the Knowledge we by our Reason have of God and his Perfections, and of our selves and our own Imperfections.* But what does he mean by the Knowledge we by our Reason have? &c. Does he mean the Knowledge Men actually have, according to the Use they actually make of their Reason, or the Knowledge Men might have by their Reason, if improv'd to the utmost of which it is naturally capable. If the former, 'tis evident that in the greatest Part of Mankind this Knowledge is very defective. Whole Nations are sunk in Barbarism and Ignorance, and have little or no right Knowledge of God or his Perfections; so that if the Law of Nature is to be measur'd by the Knowledge Men actually have of God and their Duty, it is far from deserving the glorious Epithets he bestows upon it; yet this seems to be what he frequently intends by it. Hence he tells us, that *the Knowledge of the Law of Nature is in Fact universal*; and that an *unknown Law* (by which he means, a Law that is not actually known) *is no Law*: And according to this way of stating the Law of Nature, that is, if nothing is that Law but what Men actually do know,

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it will be easily own'd to be clear to all Men; and this Author needs take no pains to shew, that Men are not ignorant of what they actually do know. But then the Law of Nature in this View is far from being absolutely perfect, as far as Men's Knowledge of God and themselves is from being so. Instead of being one uniform invariable Thing, as this Writer frequently represents it, who often talks of one universal Religion known and acknowledg'd by all Mankind, it is the most variable Thing in the World; as various as Men's Opportunities, Capacities and Diligence; there are almost as many Laws of Nature as there are Men; it must not be call'd a Law of unchangeable Perfection and without Defects, since taken in this Sense for the Knowledge Men actually have, it is very imperfect and liable to great Defects; and therefore there may be great need of external Revelation to supply those Defects. I don't see therefore how his Scheme can be possibly made to consist on this foot. But if when he defines the Law of Nature to be the Sense of those Duties which result from *the Knowledge we by our Reason have*, &c. he intends not merely the Knowledge which all Men actually have, but the Knowledge which they might have if they improv'd their Reason to the utmost of which it is capable; then this does not at all prove that the Law of Nature is so clear and obvious to all Mankind, as to render a Revelation useless, which yet is plainly the Author's Design. Many Things there are which Men might know by a just Improvement of their Reason, which yet they never wou'd know, if left merely to themselves without particular Instruction. And it may be easily shewn, that even with respect to those Principles and Duties of the Law of Nature, which absolutely speaking are discoverable by the Light of Reason; yet an external Divine Revelation may be highly useful to give the Bulk of Mankind

a clearer and a more certain Knowledge of them, than they wou'd have if left to themselves without it. This indeed is what our Author will not allow. But he takes care never to state the Question fairly, but perplexes it with many Things that are really not at all to the purpose, and serve for nothing but to confound the Reader, and mislead him from the true Point in debate. I shall therefore offer something that may serve to clear the true State of the Case, which this Gentleman has sufficiently puzzled.

And 1. it is to little purpose to inquire how far the Reason of Man may go, if improv'd to the utmost of its natural Capacity. It is a Question not easily determin'd, what is the utmost Possibility of human Reason, or how far the Faculties of Man in their greatest Improvement can reach. Nor is this a Question of much Use. For no Man, in judging of the Usefulness of any Books or Instructions, measures it by this Rule, that no Books shall be esteem'd to be of any Advantage to Mankind, except they instruct us in Things which we cou'd not otherwise possibly have known by the utmost Improvement of our natural Capacities. Many Things there are which absolutely speaking are not above the Reach of human Reason or Capacity, which yet, taking the World as it is, not one in ten thousand wou'd ever know, or cou'd be expected to do it, without the Advantage of particular Instruction. And yet a considerable Part of what this Gentleman offers on this Head of the Clearness of the Law of Nature, amounts to no more than this, that Men have natural Faculties, which if improved as far as they are naturally capable, may enable them to know the main Principles and Duties of that Law. Thus he often talks of the Rules of the Law of Nature being *discoverable* or *knowable* by Men, p. 295 *. that *we must as Men be capable of knowing Religion,*

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p. 197 *. that "Man has *natural Abilities* to distinguish between Good and Evil, or to know what is pleasing or displeasing to God; and that "Men *are able* by their Reason to distinguish between Religion and Superstition." See the Title of his 13th Chapter. And that "the Law of Nature is what Men, when they come to the Use of their Reason, are *capable of knowing*," p. 9 †."

This natural Capacity seems to be all that he means by what he so much extols, the Sufficiency of the Light of Nature. He tells us, that "God hath at all Times given the whole Race of Mankind sufficient means to enable them to discover what he wills them to know, believe, profess and practise, p. 5. And this means he makes to be *Reason, or the Use of those Faculties; whereby Men are distinguish'd from the Brutes, and that therefore Reason, human Reason, must be the means sufficient to produce its intended Effect*, p. 6. By comparing which Passages it appears, that when he so often supposes all Men at all Times to have had sufficient means for knowing the Law of Nature, he intends no more than this, that God hath given all Men, at all Times, in one Age as well as another, rational Faculties or Capacities, which if improv'd to the utmost that is naturally possible, might enable them to discern the great Principles and Obligations of natural Religion; and in this Sense he might well ask as he does, *What Advantage hath one Age in this respect above another?* For it will be own'd, that Men have generally had the same Natural Capacities and Faculties in one Age as in another. But if the Question be concerning the Helps or Advantages for assisting those natural Faculties, it is evident there has been, in this respect, a very great Difference between some Persons, and Nations, and Ages, and

* P. 174. † P. 8.

and others; that some have had far greater Advantages for Instruction and Improvement in useful Knowledge, even of natural Religion, than others; and to say that all Men, at all Times, have had equal Means in this respect, is contrary to Fact. And the Author himself supposes it, when he affirms, that *it is not necessary that all Men shou'd have equal Knowledge* (even of the Law of Nature, for of this he is speaking) *but that all shou'd have sufficient for the Circumstances they are in*, p. 5 *. where he plainly supposes, that notwithstanding this natural Sufficiency he speaks of, and the Means which he supposes to be given to all Men, yet some have greater Advantages and Helps for knowing the Principles and Obligations of natural Religion, and therefore greater Means for discovering the Will of God than other Men; and therefore know more than some in other Circumstances have an Opportunity for knowing. And, in this Sense, that which he asserts, p. 295 †. and elsewhere, that *the Will of God, on which the Happiness of Mankind at all times depends, is at all times equally knowable*; if by that be meant, that all Men, at all times, have equal Advantages and Opportunities for knowing it, is manifestly false. It appears then, that the natural Sufficiency of our Reason, or of our rational Powers, if improv'd to the utmost that they are capable of, for discovering the main Principles and Duties of the Law of Nature, does not at all shew that therefore a Revelation can be of no Use for giving us a clearer Knowledge of that Law, no more than it shews, that because our Faculties are naturally sufficient, therefore we need no Instruction of any kind at all. Notwithstanding our rational Powers have a natural Capacity for discerning Truth, yet 'tis certain we stand in need of many Helps and Assistances to guide us in the Knowledge of Truth, and that in

many Cases we shou'd never discover it without such Assistances and Instructions. Our Author frequently opposes our taking in Things by Reason and by Revelation; but these are not to be oppos'd to one another as if they were inconsistent. Revelation supposes us reasonable Creatures, and to have natural Capacities for discerning Truth, or else it wou'd be of no Use. For if we were Brutes, we cou'd not be capable of knowing or receiving those Discoveries. The true Opposition is this, tho' never fairly stated by the Author, not between Reason or our natural Faculties and Revelation, as if Revelation was inconsistent with our rational Faculties, but between Reason under the Conduct of Revelation, and Reason without that Help; or between our knowing by our rational Faculties, when assisted and inlightned by Instruction and Revelation, and our knowing by our rational Faculties left merely to themselves without such Assistance.

2dly, The Question is not, whether the main Principles and Duties of Morality, or of the Law of Nature, be so just and reasonable in themselves, that right Reason, if unprejudic'd and duly exercis'd, wou'd approve them, when fairly explain'd, and set in a proper Light? for this will be easily granted; and this is all that the many Passages he produces from Dr. *Clark*, and which he makes so great Use of in his last Chapter, do prove. The Doctor uses many strong Expressions to shew, that the main Principles and Duties of the Law of Nature are in themselves so clear, so just, so agreeable to Reason, that all unprejudic'd and well-dispos'd Minds can't but approve them, when fairly propos'd and explain'd to them; he speaks of what is in it self clear to right Reason duly exercis'd and improv'd, but does not intend to signify, that therefore all Men do naturally and necessarily know the Law of Nature, and that no Man can possibly be ignorant of it.

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That this is the Intention of those Passages this Gentleman cites from Dr. *Clark*, appears from several other Passages in his Book, where he clearly explains his Design, if he had been so fair as to produce them. Thus he tells us, that “ what these eternal
“ Relations, Respects and Proportions of Things,
“ with their consequent Agreements or Disagree-
“ ments, Fittests or Unfittests, absolutely and
“ necessarily are in themselves; that also they ap-
“ pear to be to the Understanding of all intelligent
“ Beings, except those only who understand Things
“ to be what they are not, that is, whose Under-
“ standings are either very imperfect, or very much
“ depraved.” See *Discourse of natural and reveal’d Religion*, p. 184. 7th Edit. where it is plain, that he supposes those whose Understandings are very imperfect or very much deprav’d, may not see those Fittests or Unfittests, &c. and this he supposes to be the Case of the far greater Part of Mankind in their present State; and that therefore “ few are
“ able, in Reality and Effect, to discover these
“ Things clearly and plainly for themselves; but
“ Men have great need of particular Teaching and
“ much Instruction to convince them of the Truth,
“ and Certainty, and Importance of these Things, to
“ give them a due Sense and clear and just Appre-
“ hensions concerning them, and to bring them ef-
“ fectually to the Practice of the plainest and most
“ necessary Duties.” This he sets himself largely to prove from p. 272 of his Discourse to p. 281.

I cannot therefore acquit the Author from gross Prevarication, when from mangled Passages of Dr. *Clark* he wou’d fain make his Readers believe, that he makes the whole Law of Nature, and the Differences of Things, to be what all Men naturally and necessarily assent to, even without Reflexion, p. 361*. and what they all actually do know, and cannot but

know in their present State, taking Mankind as they now are ; and yet it is upon this Misrepresentation of the Doctor's Sense that he so unreasonably triumphs, and unmercifully exposes him for endeavouring to prove, that a great Part of Mankind are ignorant of what he owns all Men, even without Reflexion or Instruction, cannot but naturally and necessarily know.

I wonder this Author, when his hand was in, did not attempt to prove that Dr. *Clark* also suppos'd, that all Men's Wills are naturally and necessarily determin'd to the Practice of the Duties requir'd in the Law of Nature. For after having said, that " what the eternal Relations of Things are in themselves, that they appear to be to the Understandings of all intelligent Beings, &c. he adds, " and " by this Understanding or Knowledge of the natural and necessary Relations, Fittestes and Proportions of Things, the Wills likewise of all intelligent Beings are constantly directed, and " must needs be determin'd to act accordingly." 'Tis true he adds, " excepting those only who will " Things to be what they are not, and cannot be ; " that is, whose Wills are corrupted, &c." But did he not also limit his former Proposition, and except those *whose Understandings are imperfect or deprav'd*? And if the Limitation and Exception must be dropp'd in one Case, in order to expose the Doctor, why not in the other too? And so this learned Writer may be made to maintain, that all Men naturally and necessarily both know and practise the Law of Nature, and consequently that no Man can possibly be either ignorant of it in Notion, or can transgress it in Practice ; a Thing both contrary to undeniable Matter of Fact, and to the very Design of the Doctor's whole Book, and which indeed scarce any Man in his Senses wou'd attempt to prove.

I mention this as a Specimen of this Gentleman's Candor, and Treatment of a Person for whom he professes the highest Regard; though I can't help thinking, when I consider how unworthily and dissingenuously he treats him, that the Encomiums he bestows upon him, are chiefly design'd to heighten his own Triumphs over the Doctor, and in him over Christianity it self; for he tells us, that if it cou'd be defended, the Doctor of all Men was the most able to defend it.

But to return from this Digression, the true State of the Question in the present Debate is this, Whether all Mankind have, by the mere Light of their own Reason in their present State, such a clear Discovery of the great Principles and Obligations of the Law of Nature, that no external Revelation can be of use to render it clearer or more certain to any than it is to all Men without it; and consequently whether, taking Mankind as they are, they had best be left every Man to collect his Duty for himself by the mere Light of his own Reason, and to form to himself a System of Morals, and of the great Principles and Obligations of natural Religion, or whether an external Revelation might not be highly useful to the Bulk of Mankind, to give them a clearer Knowledge of these things, and greater Certainty about them; as well as to inforce the Practice of them by the strongest Motives?

For though the great Principles of natural Religion, and the moral Obligations arising from them, be naturally knowable by us; and though the Understanding God hath given us be naturally sufficient, that is, absolutely speaking hath a natural Capacity to know and discern those Principles and Obligations; yet if as the World is circumstanc'd, and taking Mankind as they are, it cannot ordinarily be expected that the Bulk of Mankind shou'd know them properly without Assistance, then such Assis-

tance may be of vast Use to help them to a right Discernment of them. And therefore if in condescension to the Weakness and Corruption of Mankind, and to rescue them from the Ignorance and Darkness in which they were involv'd, it has pleas'd God to give a plain external Revelation for instructing and directing us to a right Discernment even of the great Principles and Duties of the Law of Nature, and to bind them upon us by the strongest Motives; this is certainly a great Goodness, and ought to be acknowledg'd as such.

Our Author therefore can never answer his End, which is to shew, that an external Revelation can be of no Use to instruct us in the Principles and Duties of the Law of Nature; except he can prove that these things are so obvious and plain to all Men, that even the Bulk of Mankind need no Assistance to enable them to form a right Judgment concerning them.

Accordingly this is what he frequently attempts to shew. He often talks as if he thought there were a regular Scheme of Principles, which he calls the Law of Nature, fairly drawn upon the Mind of every Man, in such a manner that it is scarce possible for any Man to mistake it; that all the Principles of Religion, all the Duties incumbent upon us, are so clear, that all Men see them at first view, and it is impossible for these Principles to be made clearer to any Man by any outward Teaching, than they are to all Men without it; and if this be once granted, that the whole Compass of our Duty is known to all Men without an external Revelation, as perfectly, as clearly and certainly, as it cou'd be by the Help of such a Revelation, the Consequence is very plain, that an external Revelation is intirely useless. This seems to be really the Author's Scheme. But that I may not wrong him, I shall produce his own Words.

As he tells us, that “ there is a Religion of Nature and Reason written in the Hearts of every one of us from the first Creation, and which God *continually impresses* on the Minds of all Men, and *continually dictates* to them, p. 8, 59, 135. *” So he declares, that “ no great Wisdom is requir’d to know the Law of Nature; and that no well-meaning Gentile cou’d be ignorant of it, p. 398 †.” That “ it is a perpetual standing Rule for Men of the meanest as well as highest Capacity, and carries its own Evidence with it, p. 243.” He supposes “ the eternal Reason and unalterable Relations of Things to be obvious to the meanest Capacity, and to be apparent to the whole World, p. 292, 327.” “ even to those that are unable to read in their Mother-Tongue, p. 295.” Accordingly he asks, “ let any one say, how is it possible God cou’d more fully make known his Will to all intelligent Creatures, than by making every thing within and without them a Declaration of it, and an Argument for observing it? p. 19, 20 ‖.” Where he seems to say, that God cou’d not possibly make the Law of Nature clearer than it is, or give a plainer Discovery of it to Mankind than he has done already. To the same purpose he saith, p. 27 ‡. that “ had God from time to time spoke to all Mankind in their several Languages, and his Words had miraculously convey’d the same Ideas to all Persons; yet he cou’d not speak more plainly than he has done by the Things themselves, and the Relation which Reason shews there is between them.” Where he plainly intimates, that the Reason of all Mankind so clearly and strongly shews them their Duty, by collecting it from the Nature and Relations of Things, that no outward Instruction can give them any Assistance in it, or help them to form a clearer Judgment than they

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may

* P. 7, 49, 118.

† P. 361.

‖ P. 17.

‡ P. 22.

may easily of themselves do without it. And yet I think it may be affirm'd, that one Man can, by speaking or writing, help another to form a better Judgment concerning Things and their Relations, than he wou'd have without such Instruction; and shall we say then that God himself can't do it?

But to proceed: He often talks as if the Principles and Obligations of natural Religion were so clear, that Men cou'd not possibly mistake them. He observes, that " what we call Instinct is a certain " and infallible Guide for inferior Animals;" and asks, " has God a greater Kindness for the Brute than the " Rational Creation? And if we can't charge God " with acting thus partially, must we not be oblig'd " to own, that Reason is as certain a Guide for " rational Creatures, as Instinct is for irrational? " p. 276, 277 *." And he tells us, that " those " Relations (viz. which we stand in to God and to one another) " which are the permanent Voice of " God by which he speaks to all Mankind, do at " all Times *infallibly* point to us our Duty in all " the various Circumstances of Life, p. 31 †." And again, that " if God only commands what the Nature of Things shews to be fit, *'tis scarce possible* " that Men (though endlessly divided upon the account of their different Traditions) shou'd mistake " their Duty; since a Mind that's attentive can as " easily distinguish fit from unfit, as the Eye can " Beauty from Deformity, or the Ear Harmony " from Discord, *ibid.*" He talks as if the Deists were infallibly guided to distinguish between Religion and Superstition, p. 37 †. where he tells us (speaking of the Deists) that " having critically " examin'd Doctrines by that Reason which God " has given them, to distinguish Religion from Superstition, they *are sure* not to run into any Errors of moment." He asks, " if the Creator " expects nothing from his Creatures, but what

* P. 250. † P. 27. † P. 336. the

“ the Relation they stand in to him and one another
“ makes it fit for them to do, *how can they be igno-*
“ *rant of their Duty?* p. 357*.” Where he speaks,
as if it were not possible for Men to be ignorant of
what is fit for them to do; and of what the relation
they stand in to God and to one another does re-
quire or admit. And he represents the Deists as
“ celebrating the unlimited Goodness of God, in
“ supposing that God has given all Men at all times,
“ even those of the meanest Capacity, sufficient
“ means of discovering what makes for their present
“ and future Happiness; and that no Man can plead
“ Ignorance of a Law as evident as that the Sun is
“ bright, or Snow white, and as inseparable from
“ rational Nature as the Pulse of the Heart and
“ Arteries are from animal Nature, p. 362, 363 †.”
This he infers from a Passage of Dr. *Clark's*, which
is design'd to shew, that Reason, when rightly ex-
ercis'd and purg'd from vicious Prejudices, cannot
but assent to and approve the great Principles and
Obligations of the Law of Nature, when fairly pro-
pos'd to it. But this Author applies it to all Man-
kind in their present State, as if the actual Knowledge
of the whole Law of Nature were so inseparable from
rational Nature, that it is as impossible for any rea-
sonable Creature to be ignorant of it, as it is for
any Animals to live without the Pulse of the Heart
and Arteries; that the Knowledge of the Law of
Nature is naturally necessary, and comes with irre-
fistible Evidence; that it needs no Reflection or
Consideration, but the most illiterate Rustick may as
easily and certainly know it, as a Man that has made
the deepest Inquiries. It cannot therefore be won-
der'd at, that this Writer seems sometimes to assert,
that all Men do actually know the whole Law of
Nature, though at other times he seems only to plead
for their being capable of knowing it. Hence he
finds

* P. 323. † P. 328.

finds fault with Dr. *Clark* for saying, that *the Knowledge of that Law is in fact by no means universal*, and endeavours to prove that it is in fact universal, p. 379, 380*.

And now if this be a just Representation of the State of Mankind; if it be true, that God cou'd not possibly make known his Will more clearly, or speak more plainly than he has already done to all Mankind by the Light of Nature; if all the Principles and Duties of natural Religion be so clearly known to all Men that they see it at first View, and it is scarce possible for them to mistake it; if the Knowledge of the Law of Nature be in fact universal; and all Mankind actually know their Duty to God and Man, and can't possibly be ignorant of it; if all this be so as this Gentleman represents it, it must be own'd that there is no need of any outward Revelation at all, to tell Men what they all know, and cannot but know already.

But methinks he knows little of the World, or of the present State of the human Nature, that can persuade himself that this is a just Representation of the Case. If any Man under pretence of doing honour to God, and standing up for the Dignity and Perfection of the human Nature, shou'd take upon him to affirm, that all Men are actually good and virtuous, kind and benevolent, pious and just, sober and temperate; that there is no such thing as Vice, Cruelty, Fraud or Violence, Impiety or Intemperance in the World; for these things are contrary to the very Constitution of the human Nature, and to the very Make of Man, and inconsistent with the Order of his Faculties; that therefore all Complaints of these things are vain and groundless, a Libel on the Dignity of human Nature, and a blaspheming God the Author of it; if any Man shou'd talk at this rate, and boast of his Scheme as highly consulting the Honour of God, and making

* P. 344.

ing an amiable Representation of human Nature; wou'd this be able to persuade Men contrary to plain Fact, and to what they all evidently see and know by daily Observation and Experience, that indeed the World is universally good and virtuous, and that there neither is nor can be Vice or Wickedness among Men? One wou'd indeed be apt to wish that such a Representation of human Nature were true, but it wou'd be hard to make any Man believe it is so. The same I must say to the Scheme of the Author of *Christianity as Old as the Creation*; it looks beautifully in Speculation, and I heartily wish it were true; but evident Fact and Experience proves that it is false.

He would persuade us, that all Mankind are clear-sighted, when we find they are generally involv'd in Darkness and Error; that the Law of Nature, in its important Principles and Obligations, is so necessarily known to all Mankind, that they cannot mistake their Duty, when we find they actually do mistake it in very important Instances; that it is so clear and plain, that even the most illiterate, and those of the meanest Abilities, without Instruction may easily discern it, when it is evident from Experience, that without Instruction they wou'd not discern it; that all Men actually agree in their Judgments about it, as much as they do that the Sun is bright and the Snow white, when we find in fact that they mightily disagree about it. Yea, the Author himself subverts his own goodly Scheme, when he frequently supposes almost all Mankind, Jews, Heathens, Christians, to have fallen from the original Religion of Nature. A great Part of his Book is spent in Invectives against that Superstition which he supposes to have prevail'd all over the World in all Ages and Nations, and from which none are exempted but the *Free-thinking Few*, as he calls them, (see p. 169 *.) by whom he certainly understands those

those that like himself are for casting off all external Revelation, and adhering to what he calls the *pure simple Dictates* of the Law of Nature. And I hope to be able to prove before I have done, that even this Gentleman, with all his boasted Clearness, is very wrong in his Notions of some of the main Principles of the Law of Nature, the Clearness of which he so much extols.

Now it is unconceivable, that almost all Mankind in all Ages should be thus deceived and imposed upon in Matters of great Importance, and should be generally involved in gross Superstition, and in an Ignorance of *the true primitive natural Religion*, as he calls it, if it was so plain to all Mankind that they could not but know it, and could scarce possibly be mistaken about it.

It cannot be denied, that it was generally true of the Heathen World, that (as the Apostle expresses it) “ they changed the Glory of the incorruptible “ God into an Image made like to corruptible Man, “ and to Birds and four-footed Beasts and creeping “ Things, and worshipped and served the Creature “ more than the Creator, *Rom. i. 23, 25.*” The Knowledge and Worship of the only true God was in a great measure lost among Men, amidst a Multiplicity of false and fictitious Deities, to whom they paid that Adoration that was only due to the Supreme. Polytheism, or the Acknowledgment and Worship of many Gods, generally prevail’d; and it is astonishing to think what strange Things they set up for Deities, to which they erected Altars and paid Divine Honours; and that even in *Greece and Rome*, the Seat of Learning and Politeness, where they had the Advantage of the Writings and Instructions of those Philosophers for whom this Author professes so high a Veneration. Every one knows that the common Pagan Theology was full of the Rapes, Adulteries, and Contentions of their Gods, whom they represented

represented with all the Vices and Passions of frail Mortals; so that scarce any Man could be guilty of Immoralities so gross, but he might plead some one or other of their Deities for an Example. Suitable to their Deities were the Rites of their Worship; many of them absurd and ridiculous, some of them cruel and barbarous, and some of them impure and lascivious, and evidently subversive of Morality.

It is manifest then, that the Heathen World were generally sunk into the most gross and deplorable Darkness and Ignorance of the Law of Nature, in some of its important Branches. And if this Representation be a just one, as it undeniably is, it must seem a very odd Question that he asks, p. 394*. *How can we be ignorant what Worship, what Service we are to render to God?* As if it was impossible for Men to be ignorant of what we find, in fact, almost the whole World was ignorant of, and are so to this day, except where they are under the Conduct of Revelation; and probably this Gentleman thinks they are ignorant of it too.

And now what shall we say to his Assertion, that “ it required no great Wisdom to know the Law of Nature, and that no well-meaning Gentile could be ignorant of it? p. 398 †.” Was there scarce any such thing as a well-meaning Gentile for many Ages in *Greece* and *Rome*? Did they all, against their own express Knowledge, universally counteract the Law of Nature? Is not this to pronounce a very heavy Sentence upon the whole Heathen World?

But, says our Author, “ it can’t be imputed to any Defect in the Light of Nature, that the Pagan World ran into Idolatry; but to their being entirely govern’d by Priests, who pretended Communication with their Gods; and to have thence their Revelations, which they imposed on the Credulous as Divine Oracles: whereas the Business

* P 357.

† P. 361.

“ nefs of the Christian Dispensation was to destroy
 “ all those traditional Revelations; and restore, free
 “ from Idolatry, the true primitive and natural Re-
 “ ligion, implanted in Mankind from the Cre-
 “ ation, p. 379 *.”

I would here remark, that he supposes the true primitive natural Religion to be free from Idolatry; and if so, how can he pretend that this true primitive Religion is what all Men are agreed in, though endlessly divided about other things; that it is known to all Mankind, and has been always the same? See p. 11, 12. If the true primitive natural Religion was free from Idolatry, must it not be own'd that the Heathens were fallen from that true primitive natural Religion? He endeavours indeed to account for it by casting the fault upon the Priests; but if the Light of Nature was so clear and strong as he represents it, and that *no well-meaning Gentile could be ignorant of the Law of Nature*, that is, the true primitive natural Religion; I can't conceive how it could be in the power of the Priests to bring the whole World into Idolatry and into Superstition, which he frequently supposes, and endeavours in his whole eighth Chapter to prove, to be plainly contrary to the Religion of Nature. Besides, he does wrong to lay all the blame upon the Priests; since it is manifest, that the publick Laws establish'd by their best and wisest Men, their Law-givers and Heroes, that set up for reforming and civilizing Mankind, concurr'd to establish Idol-Worship, and give a sanction to the popular Superstition. And it may be added, that the Men who made it their business to addict themselves to the Study of Wisdom, and assum'd the glorious Title of Philosophers, patroniz'd the common Idolatry and Superstition by their Maxims and by their own Practice.

I

I know the Author takes a great deal of pains to clear the Philosophers; they were clear-sighted Men, and had a perfect knowledge of the Law of Nature. He will not allow what Dr. *Clark* alledges, that they were ignorant of the acceptable way of worshipping God; and yet he cannot deny what the Doctor produces for the Proof of it, that they fell universally into the Practice of the most foolish Idolatry. See p. 395*, &c. He seems willing to vindicate the Knowledge of those Philosophers at the Expence of their Honesty and Candor; that, contrary to their own Consciences, they countenanc'd what they knew to be the grossest Idolatry and Superstition, highly dishonourable to the Supreme Being. This he particularly supposes to have been the Case of *Plato* and *Cicero*; and the Excuse he makes for the latter is pretty extraordinary, that "*as a Philosopher he not only knew but spoke the Truth, though as a Priest he thought fit to dissemble*, p. 396†." A very nice Distinction this; by the Help of which the same Man may be prov'd to be both very honest and a great Knave. But if *Cicero* the Priest be condemn'd by the supreme Judge of the World, for dissembling and countenancing that Superstition and Idolatry which his own Conscience disapprov'd, what wou'd become of *Cicero* the Philosopher? He produces a Passage out of his *Oratio pro Domo sua ad Pontifices*, to shew with what Freedom he treats the Priests; but it might be easily shewn, that this Passage, like many others of his Quotations, is nothing to the purpose. He did not design, in the Words this Gentleman produces, to reflect on the Priests, or on the Religion of his Country, of both which he speaks all along in that Oration with great Respect; but on *Clodius* for polluting the sacred Rites, and making use of the Pretence of Religion and Priesthood, for serving the Ends of his

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* P. 358, &c. † P. 359.

own Ambition and Avarice. Does not he begin that Oration with praising the Wisdom of their Ancestors, in appointing that the same Persons that had the chief Administration in Civil Affairs, shou'd also preside over the Ceremonies of Religion? [which by the way shews, that when this Author reflects upon the Heathen Priests, it is in effect to lay the blame on the greatest Men in the Commonwealth.] Does he not every where there speak of their Office, and of the publick Ceremonies of Religion, with great Regard, and conclude that Oration with a most solemn Address to *Jupiter Capitolinus*, to *Vesta*, and the other Deities, by whose Care he supposes the *Roman* Commonwealth to have been first founded, and still protected? He declares, that it was one of the greatest Advantages he propos'd to himself in his Return from his Banishment, to be restor'd to their Temples and sacred Rites again, and appeals to them, that to defend and support these had been the chief Care and the most glorious Work of his Consulship.

But he says, *Cicero* thought it prudent to use some *softening Expressions*. What does he call *softening Expressions*? Is recommending the Worship both of the Celestial Deities, (that is, *Jupiter*, *Juno*, *Apollo*, &c.) and of the Demi-gods and Heroes, (such as *Hercules*, *Romulus*, *Æsculapius*, *Bacchus*) and of the Household Gods, and urging it as a Duty in these Things to follow the Religion of their Ancestors, is this only to use softening Expressions? Yet this he does in his Treatise of Laws, *Lib. 2.* one of his best and most serious Writings, where he appears with the greatest Gravity, and puts on the Character of a Law-giver.

Indeed though *Cicero*, *Plato*, and many others of the Philosophers, did not approve of some of the popular Superstitions, and the Rites made use of in the Worship of their Deities, and laugh'd at many
of

of the common Stories and Traditions; yet it does not appear from their most serious Writings, that they disapprov'd that kind of Worship in general which was then in use, that is, Image-Worship, and the Worship of the inferior Deities, or, as this Author calls them, the mediatory Gods; which yet he thinks and endeavours to prove is contrary to the Law of Nature, or to what Reason dictates. See the Beginning of his eighth Chapter. It is well known that the *Platonick* Philosophers made the Doctrine of Demon-Worship a part of their Philosophy; so that their Philosophy it self was calculated to promote and defend the publick Superstition; and after Christianity appear'd, and condemn'd the common Idolatry, the Philosophers were zealous Advocates for the Rites of the Heathen Worship, and the Honour of their Deities; and the most refin'd of them employ'd all their Eloquence, all the Arts and plausible Colours of reasoning their Philosophy cou'd furnish them with, to defend the establish'd Idolatry, and uphold the tottering Superstition of their Ancestors. And I have not so very bad an Opinion of their Sincerity, as to think that in all this they spoke against their Consciences, and so zealously defended what they themselves thought highly dishonourable to the Supreme Being.

I can't therefore but think it a very pertinent Question of Dr. *Clark*, though our Author seems to think it a very foolish one, p. 398*. "What Grounds our modern Deists have to imagine, that if they themselves had lived without the Light of the Gospel, they had been wiser than *Plato*, *Socrates*, and *Cicero*?" If those great Men, notwithstanding all their Wisdom and Penetration, were so much in the dark in Things of considerable Importance, and on which the right Worship of the Deity so much depends, what Reason is there

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to think that our modern Gentlemen wou'd have been more able to find out the true and acceptable Manner of worshipping God, in opposition to all Superstition, false Worship, and Idolatry, than they I suppose these Gentlemen now look upon the worshipping of Images, and of inferior Deities or Demons, as gross Superstition; it is plain this Author does, and that he represents it as owing to *very unworthy Notions of the supreme Being*; see p. 86*. And how came they to discover this any more than *Plato and Cicero*, and the most learned Philosophers of *Greece and Rome*? It can be ascrib'd to nothing so properly as to their being bred up under the Light of the Gospel; and then they ascribe that to the mere Force of their own Reason, for which they were originally indebted to Revelation. Nay, what Security wou'd there be if the Gospel was once banished from amongst us, that they wou'd not generally relapse in a few Generations into the same Superstition and Idolatry, in which their Pagan Ancestors were involv'd, and which still prevails in all Countries where Men have no other Light than that of Nature to direct them? For as to *Mahometan* Countries, it may justly be presum'd, that *Mahomet* borrow'd his Notions of God and his Worship from the holy Scriptures, which it is plain he was acquainted with.

Upon this view we may easily see with what Justice this Writer finds fault with Dr. *Clark* for saying, that *the Knowledge of the Law of Nature is in fact by no means universal*. A thing capable of as evident Proof as any Fact whatsoever. And therefore all the Author's Arguings against it are no better than Arguments against plain undeniable Fact; and against what he himself must own to be so, since he makes the Law of Nature to be free from Idolatry. We need not therefore give our selves much
 Trouble

Trouble to examine the Reasons he produces on this Head, p. 379, 380. and which after all prove no more than that Men are *capable* of knowing the Law of Nature, if they improv'd their reasoning Faculties to the utmost; which is not to the present Question. This is all that the Argument proves, which he draws from Man's being an accountable Creature; this only shews, that therefore he must be *capable* of knowing that Law for which he is accountable; not that (as this Author expresses it) *the Light of Nature*, or every Man's own Reason, *plainly and undeniably teaches him that Law*, (in all its Branches) if by this he means, that it so teaches him, that no Man can in fact be ignorant of it. When the Apostle *Paul* declares in the Passages produc'd by the Author, speaking of the Gentiles, that *that which was known of God was manifest in them*, and that *when they knew God they glorified him not as God*, this is only design'd to shew, that the Gentiles had some Knowledge of God by the Light of Nature, and might have had more, if they had made a just Improvement of their Reason; but it cou'd not be his Design in these Words to insinuate that they all actually knew the whole Law of Nature, and particularly relating to the true Worship of the Deity, when he himself there shews, that *they became vain in their Imaginations*, or Reasonings, [*διδιογισμοις*] and *their foolish Heart was darkned*.

The Author's Inference from the Apostle's saying, that *the Gentiles having not the Law, are a Law unto themselves*; and that *they that have not the Law, do by Nature the things contained in the Law*, is so very remarkable, that I cannot pass it by, viz.
“ that this shews that the Law of Nature and Grace
“ are the same; and that there is but one Law, whether that Law be written on Paper, or in Men's
“ Hearts only; and that all Men, by the Judg-

“ment they pass on their own Actions, are conscious of this Law.” That is, as the Author plainly intends it, that they actually know that Law in all its Extent. Where he makes the Apostle to mean, that the Law of Nature written in the Hearts of the Gentiles, and the Gospel or Law of Grace, are the same in all respects, and of the same Extent, and that all Men actually know it; that is, that the Gentiles already knew by Nature that Gospel which he was commission’d to preach to ’em; and so he was to instruct ’em in nothing but what they actually knew before. To put such a Meaning upon the Apostle’s Words, is not treating him with common Candor and Decency; how cou’d he then declare to the *Athenians* (the most knowing and learned among the Heathens) that he came to declare to ’em *the unknown God whom they ignorantly worshipped?* Acts 17. 23. How cou’d he call the Times past of the Gentiles *the Times of Ignorance?* v. 30. How cou’d he represent them as *alienated from the Life of God through the Ignorance that was in them because of the Hardness of their Hearts?* Eph. 4. 18. and give this Account of his Commission, that he was sent *to turn them from Darkness unto Light?* &c. Acts 26. 18.

Nor is the other Argument he offers, p. 380 *. more to the purpose, viz. that *an unknown Law is no Law, and that therefore the Gentiles must have known that Law.* It is not necessary to the Obligation of a Law that it be actually known; it is sufficient if it have been promulgated so that Men might have known it; this Argument therefore proves indeed, that the Gentiles might have known that Law far better than they did, if it had not been owing to their own culpable Negligence and sinful Prejudices; and in this Case their Ignorance of the Law of Nature did not absolutely excuse or free them from the Obligation of it; but this does not

prove that all Men actually know that Law, and and that the Knowledge of it is in fact universal. This is what the Author shou'd here prove, if he argued to the purpose, since he is arguing against the Doctor's Assertion, *that the Knowledge of the Law of Nature is in fact by no means universal*; but when we expect to see this prov'd, he slips the Question, and proves another thing, *viz.* that Men are capable of knowing it, or that it is possible for them to know it.

Indeed the main Strength of his fourteenth Chapter is bended to prove, that Men, particularly the Heathens, were not *unavoidably ignorant* of the great Principles and Obligations of the Law of Nature. Dr. *Clark* seems to assert this; and the Author takes his Expressions in the utmost Strictness, as signifying that it was simply and absolutely impossible for them to know it; but a little Candor wou'd have taught him, that the Doctor did not speak of a simple and natural Impossibility. For he expressly saith, *that in Speculation this may seem possible, but in Experience it has appear'd otherwise*; see Discourse of natural and reveal'd Religion, p. 302. And again, *that the bare natural Possibility of the thing cannot be denied*, *ibid.*

But though the Ignorance of the Gentiles, with respect to the Law of Nature, was not absolutely and naturally unavoidable; though absolutely speaking it might be said not to be simply impossible for them to shake off their Prejudices; for if they had used their utmost possible Diligence, and improv'd their Reason to the utmost that they were naturally capable of, they might have discover'd the Absurdity of that Idolatry and Superstition, and might have had far worthier and juster Notions of God and of his Worship than they generally had; yet in fact taking human Nature as it now is, and speaking according to the ordinary Course of Things,

and the common Temper of Mankind in this present State, it was so difficult for those that were born in such Times of Degeneracy, to avoid the common Corruption and Idolatry, that it is ten thousand to one that they wou'd never, if left merely to themselves and to the Force of their own Reason, without any farther Assistance, overcome those Prejudices, and recover out of that Superstition in which they lay involv'd. What Allowances may be made for this by the wise and merciful Governor of the World, is another Question; tho' the Author all along artfully confounds these two Questions, which are very distinct; *viz.* whether the Gentiles were generally ignorant of the Law of Nature, in some of its important Articles and Obligations? and how God will deal with them in such a case? The former is a Matter of Fact we can easily judge of; the latter we cannot properly take upon us to determine, though I think it is easy to shew (and hope to do it afterwards) that we may have more favourable Thoughts of the State of the Heathens than this Gentleman can have consistently with his own Scheme.

But we must not argue against plain Matter of Fact, such as this, that the Heathens were universally in a State of gross Ignorance and Superstition for many Ages, under pretence that it can't be reconcil'd to the Divine Goodness; as reasonably might we deny that the World is full of Sin and Wickedness, and that Mankind are in a very corrupt and degenerate State, though we plainly see it is so, because this is at least as hard to account for as the other.

By this we may judge of the Author's labour'd Harangue in his last Chapter, which he repeats and with so much Art exaggerates, to shew the Absurdity of supposing, that " God plac'd Mankind
" without any Fault of theirs, in an unavoidable

“ State of Degeneracy and Corruption for 4000
“ Years together, and still continues the greatest
“ part of them in the same State; and that he gave
“ them no other Light but what had such undeni-
“ able Defects, as made them incapable of know-
“ ing their Duty.”

That *the Light of Nature* (if by that be meant the Knowledge Men actually had of the Law of Nature by their own Reason, when left to themselves without a Divine Revelation) *had undeniable Defects*, as Dr. Clark expresses it, is manifest in Fact. But it does not follow, that therefore *God gave them no other Light but what had such undeniable Defects, as made them incapable of knowing their Duty*, as this Author speaks, p. 399 *. as if God himself was the Cause of those Defects, and of that Corruption of their Reason; for the Reason he gave them, if duly improv'd, might have carried them much further than it did, and might have enabled them to see the Absurdity of those Superstitions in which they were involv'd. Nor can it be said, that “ *God plac'd them in a State of unavoidable Degeneracy and Corruption, and still continues the greatest Part of Mankind in that State*, p. 390.” except we make his *suffering* them to fall into that State, and to continue in it, to be the same with his *causing* them to fall and to continue in that State. That the Heathens were in a State of great Degeneracy and Corruption, and that they continued in it for many Ages, this Author himself can't deny, since he must own that that Idolatry and Superstition in which they were involv'd, was a Degeneracy from the true primitive Religion of Nature, and a Corruption of it; and if he can't deny they were in such a State, he can't deny that God suffer'd them to fall into that State, and to continue in it. But must those that say no more than this, be represented as

saying that God himself plac'd them in that State, that he caus'd them to fall into it, and that he continued them in it, as if he was the Cause of their Ignorance, their Idolatry and Superstition? I don't see how this can be justified, except upon this Principle which this Gentleman seems sometimes to advance, but which bears as hard upon natural Religion as reveal'd, that God is to be reputed the Cause of whatsoever he permits; and so he may be made the Author of all the Mischief and Wickedness in the World, since it cannot be denied that he permits it.

But though God was not the Cause of that Degeneracy, that Darkness and Corruption in which the greatest Part of Mankind lay involv'd for so many Ages, and which was really and originally owing to their own Fault; yet if in compassion to this degenerate State of the World, he shou'd grant a clear external Revelation to recover them out of that State of Superstition and Corruption, it wou'd be great Goodness, though it was not what he was absolutely oblig'd to; and it can scarce be reasonably said, that supposing such a State of Things, a Revelation to clear and restore the Law of Nature wou'd be of no Use or Advantage. So that if Christianity was no more than what this Author sometimes pretends to prove it is, *a Republication of the Law of Nature*, when through the Corruption of Mankind it was generally defac'd and obscur'd, it had been a signal Benefit to the World. As to what this Gentleman lays so much Stress upon, that if such a Revelation had been given for such Purposes at all, it must have been given equally to all Mankind; all that I shall at present say concerning it is, that I can't see why he, who supposes that God left all Mankind in all Ages to extricate themselves as well as they cou'd out of their Degeneracy and Corruption by the mere Force of their own Reason without any further Assistance, shou'd be

be thought to give a more advantageous Idea of the Divine Goodness than those who suppose that God has not only given Men the Light of Reason to instruct them, (for this we own as well as he) but that when through the Corruption of Mankind this prov'd ineffectual, he has interpos'd in an extraordinary way, by giving them an additional external Revelation.

But, says he, why is not this Revelation given to all Mankind? But is it not better to give it to some part of Mankind, than to none at all, which is the Author's Supposition? If we suppose that God left a great part of Mankind for many Ages in that State of Darkness, into which they had brought themselves, without interposing in an extraordinary way to recover them out of it, this is what the Author supposes as well as we, and therefore he must maintain that this is not inconsistent with the Divine Goodness; but besides this, we suppose that he has actually given extraordinary Discoveries of his Will to a considerable part of Mankind, for recovering them out of that Degeneracy and Corruption into which they had fallen, whereas he thinks that he never gave such Discoveries to any. And I think it may be safely left to the Judgment of any common Understanding, which of these Schemes has the Advantage. And wou'd it not be very odd, on such a Supposition, for those to whom such an extraordinary Revelation was given, to reject it merely because it was not given to all Mankind as well as to them? This wou'd indeed be an extraordinary Goodness to them, which they shou'd thankfully acknowledge and carefully improve; but it wou'd be no Injustice to the rest, who on this Supposition wou'd be put into no worse a Condition than they were before; a Condition in which, according to this Gentleman himself, it was not inconsistent with the Divine Goodness to leave them.

'Tis

'Tis an Instance of this Writer's Art, that he represents all Complaints of the Darkneſs and Ignorance and Corruption of Mankind, if left to themſelves and their own unaffiſted Reaſon, as a *blaſpheming the Law of Nature it ſelf*. Thus he charges Dr. Clark as deſigning to ſhew, that the Fault was not in Mankind, but in the Guide God gave them, even in the eternal, univerſal, and unchangeable Law of Nature, p. 376, 377*. And again he charges him with writing after ſuch a Manner, as if he thought the beſt way to ſupport the Dignity of Revelation was to derogate from the immutable and eternal Law of Nature, in which though he aſſerts there are undeniable Defects, yet he owns that God governs all his own Actions by it, and expects that all Men ſhou'd govern theirs, p. 382†. But this is groſs Miſrepresentation. . It is evident to any one that reads the Doctor's Diſcourſe with common Attention and Candor, that his Deſign is to ſhew, that the Fault was not in the original Law of Nature, which he ſuppoſes to be always in it ſelf juſt and right, but that Men had through their own Corruption loſt a right Knowledge of it; the Law in it ſelf is not capable of being deprav'd, but it is manifeſt the Reaſon of Mankind is capable of being obſcur'd and deprav'd. And are not theſe very diſtinct things, to find fault with the Law of Nature, and to find fault with the Corruption of Mankind, and to ſay they have not thro' their own vicious Prejudices a right Knowledge of that Law? And muſt he that only ſays the latter, be traduc'd and represented as *blaſpheming natural Religion*, and *reviling a Religion that is eternal, univerſal, and unchangeable*? See p. 377‖.

But this Writer artfully confounds the Law and Light of Nature, and argues from the Clearneſs of the one to that of the other. Indeed it is often very hard

* P. 340, 341. † P. 346. ‖ P. 342.

hard to know what this Gentleman means by *the Light of Nature*, he takes it in such various Senses. Sometimes he takes it for the Faculty of Reason it self, sometimes he takes it objectively for the Law of Nature, which he supposes to be founded in the Nature and Reason of Things; and sometimes he seems to take it for the actual Knowledge or Discernment Men have of that Law. Thus he objects to himself, p. 376 *. “ May not the Law of Nature “ be very clear, though the Light of Nature may “ be so very dim as to have undeniable Defects?” To which he answers, “ Can the Law of Nature be “ clear, and the Light of Nature dim, when the “ Law of Nature is nothing but what the Light of “ Nature or Reason dictates?” Here he confounds Things that are very distinct, the Law and the Knowledge Men have of that Law. Will he say that the one is always as perfect as the other? He says often that the Law of Nature is eternal, absolutely unchangeable, &c. will he say that the Knowledge Men have of it by their own Reason is so too? It is impossible for the Law of Nature to be wrong, is it impossible for Men’s Notions of the Law to be so? Can there be a greater Fallacy than to argue from the one of these to the other? At this rate the Law of Nature is the most variable Thing in the World. All that any understand by saying that the Light of Nature is dim, is only that the Knowledge Men have of that Law, by their own unassisted Reason in the present State of Mankind, is very imperfect and dim; and to say this, is no Reflexion on the Law of Nature, nor on the Obligations resulting from the Relations of Things which continue in themselves the same, however Men through their Darknes and Corruption be ignorant of them, or have wrong Notions concerning them. ’Tis upon the wilful confounding of these, that the Author raises such a Clamour against

* P. 340.

Dr. *Clark*, for supposing the Light of Nature to have undeniable Defects, and that this Light was almost extinguish'd in the Heathen World, which is only to say what is evident in Fact, that Men had almost lost the true Knowledge of God and of his Worship and Law. And yet for only saying this, he must be represented as *introducing universal Scepticism, and weakening his own Demonstrations of the Being and Attributes of God.*

But the Author knows how to draw an Argument from Dr. *Clark's* asserting a Defect in the Light of Nature, to shew the Sufficiency of that Light. He argues, p. 381 *. “How can the Doctor know there are Defects in the Light of Nature but from that Light itself, which supposes this Light is all we have to trust to?” A strange Argument, and which involves a manifest Inconsistency! as if because by the Light of Nature it self Men may be sensible of their own Defects and Need of further Assistance, therefore this very Consciousness of their own Defects and Need of Assistance, supposes that they have no Defects, and need no Assistance. The Light of their own Reason taught many of the Philosophers their own Ignorance, and that they stood in need of further Instruction, but wou'd it not be a strange Inference, that because they found their Light, their Knowledge very defective, therefore they were for that Reason wholly to trust to it, and seek no further? As if because *Socrates's* Light taught him that (as he himself said) *he knew nothing*, this shew'd that he needed no further Information, nor was capable of being taught more than he knew already. The Argument wou'd rather run thus, That if by the Light of Nature Men know that there are Defects in that Light, therefore this very Light shou'd put them upon seeking further and looking for higher Assistances. And accordingly many of the Heathens

* P. 345.

thens were sensible of this, as Dr. *Clark* shews by several express Passages out of their Writings, which this Author wisely passes over.

I am afraid I shou'd be thought too tedious, if I entered into a more particular Detail of all his trifling Reasonings (for so I may justly call them) on this Subject. He seems to offer at a Stating the Question, p. 366*. where after having mention'd the Account Dr. *Clark* gives of the main Principles of the Law of Nature, he tells us, the Doctor *does not object against these Principles, but against the Manner of taking them, as they are discoverable by the Light of Nature and the Reason of Things.* This is very oddly express'd, but so much we may gather from it, that he himself owns that the present Question between him and the Doctor is not concerning the Excellency or Obligation of the Law of Nature, but concerning the Manner or Means by which we may best come to the Knowledge of that Law and of those Principles; whether this may be best done by the Assistance of divine Revelation, or by Reason alone without that Assistance. But in all that follows there is not one Argument that is properly to this Question. To what purpose is it to say, as this Author there does, that *the eternal Reason of Things is the original and the supreme Obligation, and the Rule by which all Men shou'd govern their Actions?* For granting that the Reason and Nature of Things must be our Rule, that is, that we are to act suitably to the Relations of Things, the Question still remains how we may best be inform'd what the Reason and Nature of Things does require, whether every Man may best discover it for himself by his own unassisted Reason, or by his Reason as assisted by Revelation? And to this what the Author here offers is wholly impertinent. He artfully slips the present Question, which is (as he himself had put it) about the Manner of
3 discovering

* P. 331.

discovering or taking in the Principles and Duties of the Law of Nature; and speaks to another, *viz.* on Supposition that *there is any Difference between the eternal Reason of Things and external Revelation, which of these must take place?* and argues, that “so far as Men take any other Rule than the eternal Reason of Things, so far they lose of their Perfection by ceasing to be govern’d by that Rule, in Conformity to the Nature, and in Imitation of the perfect Will of God.” But the Opposition here ought not to be put, as he unfairly puts it, between the eternal Reason of Things and external Revelation, which in that Case ought to be prefer’d; for it will be easily granted, that no true divine Revelation can contradict the eternal Reason of Things; but the Opposition is as to the Manner of discovering those Duties and Obligations which are founded in the Nature of Things, between the Discovery made by mere unassisted Reason, and the Discovery made by Reason assisted by Revelation; by which of these ways the Bulk of Mankind may best come to a right Knowledge of the Principles and Duties of the Law of Nature? And if they can come to a more perfect Knowledge and Discovery of those Principles and Obligations by external Revelation, than they cou’d have obtain’d without it, it is evident that by following that Revelation they are so far from ceasing to be govern’d by the Reason and Nature of Things, that they are more perfectly govern’d by it than they wou’d be without that Revelation; because on this Supposition they know the Reason and Relations of Things, or the Fitneses and Duties arising from them, more perfectly than they wou’d do without such a Revelation.

But, says he, speaking of the Deists, “It is impossible for them (since there can’t be two Originals of the same Thing) to chuse that Religion from external Revelation, which they have already
“ chosen

“ chosen from internal Revelation.” That is, supposing that which is the Question, *viz.* that Men have already a full and clear Knowledge of the whole of their Duty antecedently to Revelation, they can’t be said to owe that Knowledge to Revelation, which they had already without it; this will be granted: but this is the very Point in question, whether Men can as easily and certainly come to a clear and full Knowledge of the whole of their Duty, if left merely to gather it themselves by their own Reason without an external Revelation, as they may by the Assistance of such a Revelation. And it is evident the Author here offers nothing to decide that Question.

Nor is what he further offers much more to the purpose, when he adds, p. 369 *. “ that if external Revelation can’t alter the Nature of Things, and “ make that to be fit which is in itself unfit, or make “ that necessary which is in itself unnecessary, it can “ only be a Transcript of the Law of Nature.” For though Revelation can’t alter the Nature of Things, it may give us a clearer Knowledge of the Nature and Relations of Things and the Duties arising from them, than we should have had without it. It can’t change the Nature of our Duty, but it may instruct us better in it. Though it can’t make that fit which is in itself unfit, or that necessary which is in itself unnecessary, yet it may discover that to be fit and necessary for us in our present State and Circumstances, which otherwise we should not have known, or at least not so clearly and certainly known to be fit and necessary. And when he adds, that therefore *Revelation can only be a Transcript of the Law of Nature*, without inquiring at present how far it may be said to be only a Transcript of the Law of Nature, I shall only observe that if it be such a Transcript as sets it in a fairer and clearer light, and renders it more obvious and legible to the bulk of Mankind,

Mankind, this alone would be sufficient to shew the Usefulness and Advantage of Revelation, and nothing that he here offers does at all prove the contrary.

He goes on to argue, that “ Men must now, as
 “ well as formerly, judge of the Will of God by
 “ the Reason given them by an all-gracious God to
 “ distinguish between Good and Evil; and that e-
 “ very thing in external Revelation must be judg’d
 “ of by the Reason and Nature of Things, other-
 “ wise we might be obliged to admit Things neces-
 “ sarily false, p. 368, 369 *.” This Argument he repeats in several Forms in many Parts of his Book, where he often talks of the Law of Nature’s being the Test by which all traditional Revelations must be tried, which supposes that we must know the Law of Nature antecedently to Revelation, and then we need no Revelation to discover it to us. But the Fallacy of this boasted Argument will easily appear, if it be consider’d, that if it were good for any thing it would prove, that because it is by our Reason that we must judge of and understand all Books whatsoever, and must never admit any thing in any Book that is contrary to the evident Dictates of Reason, therefore no Book whatsoever can ever instruct us in any thing but what we actually knew, or might as easily have known without it; and consequently that all other Books are useless as well as the Scriptures. Thus if any Man, upon reading Sir *Isaac Newton’s Principia*, or his *Opticks*, judges that the Principles he has advanced, and his Reasonings upon them, are just and true, it proves that that Man actually knew all those things before he read them there, or might as easily have found them out himself; and consequently that all his sublime Discoveries were as well known before he writ as after. At this rate there never was or could be any new Discoveries;
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* P. 333, 334.

for Reason must judge of them whether they be true or not; and if we must judge of them by our Reason, it proves, according to our Author, that we knew them by our Reason before. Such is the Strain of this Gentleman's arguing, and which would scarce be endured on any other Subject. But any thing can go down, when it is design'd to shew there is no need or use of a Revelation, though the same Argument would prove that there is no need or use of any Books in the World, and that no Man ever said any thing in Books, but what all his Readers knew as well before. But need any Man be told, that there are many things that when discover'd to us seem perfectly just and reasonable, and agreeable to the nature of things, yea seem very plain and evident, which yet without such a Discovery we should not have known, nor could have ever found out of our selves? Though therefore it is by the Reason God hath given us, or by our rational Faculties, that we are to judge of the Revelation, and are not to admit any thing contrary to the evident Principles of Reason; it does not follow, that therefore that Revelation cannot inform us of any thing but what we might by our own Reason have discover'd as well and as easily without it.

Thus have I consider'd what our Author offers, where he seems to aim at a stating the question concerning the best manner of our coming at the Knowledge of the Law of Nature; and where therefore it might be expected, that he should have argued to the purpose, and with the greatest strength.

There are many other things scatter'd through his Book, and which he advances with great Pomp and Flourish, to shew that the Law of Nature must needs be so obvious to every Man, that it cannot be made clearer by any external Revelation. Thus he argues, that no Man can be ignorant of the Law of Nature, because no Man can transgress that Law, without

condemning himself, and acting contrary to the Judgment of his own Mind. "That natural Religion is so deeply impress'd on Men's Minds, that they can't violate its Precepts without Self-condemnation, p. 383 *." And he cites a Passage from the Dean of *Sarum* to this purpose, "that every Man is endued with such a Sense and Judgment of the Reasonableness and Fitness of conforming his Actions to the Law of Nature or moral Law, that he cannot but in his own Mind acquit himself when he does so, and condemn himself when he does otherwise." But this Rule does not hold, except it be explain'd thus, that every Man is so sensible of the Reasonableness and Fitness of the moral Law, when made known, and as far as it is known to him, that he cannot but acquit himself when he is conscious that he conforms his Actions to that Law, and condemn himself when he knows he does otherwise. But 'tis certain that a Man may counter-act that Law in very flagrant Instances without condemning himself, if at the same time he is ignorant that he counter-acts it; and this has often been the Case.

It appears from a Passage here produced by our Author from the same learned Writer, and which he seems to approve as containing his own Sentiments, that the Duties we owe to God are as evidently founded in the Nature and Reason of Things, and therefore are as much a Part of the Law of Nature as any Duties we owe to our selves or each other; and that therefore Idolatry and Superstition are as really a Breach of the Law of Nature, and as contrary to the Ideas of Comeliness and Decency as Injustice, Oppression, and Ingratitude towards Men; yet we don't find that the Heathens reproach'd and condemn'd themselves for their Idolatry and Superstition, or that in this they acted contrary to the Judgment

* P. 347.

Judgment of their own Minds, but rather thought they were doing right, and yielding an acceptable Worship to the Deity. I believe our Author himself will say, that to persecute others, merely for their religious Sentiments, is a Breach of the Law of Nature; and yet it cannot be denied that many have done it, not only without reproaching themselves on that account, but have thought that in this they did God good Service. I think it is contrary to the Law of Nature to expose and destroy weak and sickly Infants, yet it was the Custom in *Sparta*, commanded by the celebrated Laws of *Lycurgus*, approved by *Plutarch* in the Life of that Law-giver, and which was frequently practised in *Rome* itself; and we don't find that in this they thought they did wrong, but rather that they look'd upon it to be a very prudent and justifiable Practice. Theft and Rapine is contrary to the Law of Nature, and yet in some Nations it was so far from being regarded as a Crime, that it was accounted glorious and honourable, as *Herodotus* tells us of the ancient *Thracians* and *Greeks*, *Lib. 5. Cap. 6.* And *Thucydides* saith the same concerning the ancient *Barbarians* and *Grecians* in the Islands and on the Continent, that they lived chiefly upon Theft and Rapine, that way of living being then rather accounted glorious than shameful, *Lib. 1.* I mention only these Instances, to which many others might easily be added, to shew that it is a false Principle which this Author advances, that no Man can violate the Law of Nature without condemning himself, and acting contrary to the Judgment of his own Mind; and consequently that the Argument he draws from it to shew that no Man can be ignorant of the Law of Nature falls to the ground.

I need not take particular notice of the Arguments the Author brings from the divine Goodness, to shew that the Law of Nature must be at all times known to all Mankind. For if it be evident in fact,

that the greatest part of Mankind are ignorant of the Law of Nature in some important Articles of it, no Argument can be brought from the divine Goodness (in judging of which we may easily be mistaken) to prove that in fact it is not so. Does not this Gentleman himself suppose, that Mankind have in all Ages been involv'd in Superstition, a monstrous Evil which he looks upon to be worse than Atheism? And yet I believe he will hardly say that this State of Things is inconsistent with the divine Goodness, for this would be directly to say that God is not good. This Superstition, according to our Author, argues very unworthy Apprehensions of the Supreme Being, (as he frequently shews in his eighth Chapter) and therefore it argues very wrong Notions of the Law of Nature. So that, by this Gentleman's own Acknowledgment, almost all Mankind in all Ages have had very unworthy Apprehensions of God, and very wrong Notions of the Religion of Nature, and therefore there has been and is a great Darknesh upon Mankind. Why therefore should he so often represent those that speak of that Darknesh and Corruption, as highly reflecting on the Wisdom and Goodness of God, when he himself must acknowledge it as well as they? 'Tis true, this Darknesh of Error and Superstition is not owing to God, but to Men themselves; he did not bring them into it, but they brought themselves into it by an Abuse of their own Reason: but supposing them once fallen into such a State of Darknesh and Superstition and Error, it will be very hard for them to extricate themselves out of it, as all that are acquainted with Human Nature and the History of Mankind well know. If therefore God has *given all Men a plain Rule for their Conduct*, (as this Author speaks, p. 379 *.) yet it is evident in fact, that that which was originally and in itself plain to right

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* P. 343.

unprejudiced Reason, is to Reason that is corrupted with vicious Principles become so obscure, that the Generality of Mankind, taking them as they are, do not in fact know it in its just Extent, nor indeed, speaking according to the common Course of Things and Temper of Mankind, could be expected to come to the right Knowledge of it without Assistance; and on this Supposition it can scarce be denied that an external Revelation might be of great use, and that Men might more easily come to know their Duty by the help of such a Revelation, than by their own Reason without it.

Before I quit this Subject, I shall say something as to the Method the Author proposes, by which Persons of the meanest Capacity may easily come to a right Knowledge of their Duty in all its important Branches. Sometimes indeed he speaks as if he thought all Men knew it by a kind of natural Sense and Intuition, that needs very little Reflection. Many of the Passages produced above look this way. Thus he quotes a Passage from Lord *Shaftesbury*, concerning the natural Beauty of Actions as well as Figures; and it will be easily granted, that there is a Grace and Harmony in them to a well-disposed Mind. He adds, that “no sooner are Actions view’d, no sooner
“the human Affections and Passions discern’d (and
“they are most of them discern’d as soon as felt)
“than straight an inward Eye distinguishes, and sees
“the fair and shapely, the amiable and admirable,
“apart from the deform’d, the foul, the odious, or
“the despicable.” But I think it cannot be denied by any that consider the present State of Mankind, that *the inward Eye*, the Eye of the Mind is very much vitiated and obscured, and there are many things that hinder its just Discernment. Is there not as natural and as demonstrable a Grace and Beauty in the Actions of the Creature towards God as towards its Fellow-Creatures, and yet do all Men in this case

immediately discern by the inward Eye, what is fair and shapely and amiable, apart from what is foul and odious and deform'd? Whence is it then that Men in all Ages have been so apt to mistake Superstition, than which nothing, this Author being Judge, is more foul, more odious, and deform'd, for that which is the most amiable thing in the World, true Religion and Piety? And even with relation to the Duties Men owe to one another, and the Conduct of their Passions and Appetites, how often have they been mistaken in their Notions of the *fair*, the *amiable*, and *admirable*, apart from the *deformed*, the *foul*, the *odious*? Those very Passions and Affections, the Beauty or Deformity of which he makes to be for the most part *discern'd as soon as felt*, do often impose upon the Reason, and lead it to form a wrong Judgment in important Instances, and hinder it from a just Discernment. When therefore he adds, that the *Discernment*, viz. of moral Beauty and Fitness, and the contrary, is *natural and from Nature alone*; it must be own'd that this Discernment is now much weaken'd and obscur'd: It is not so from *Nature alone* as not to need great Helps to assist, to cultivate, to clear and improve it. There is a Passage of *Cicero* to this purpose, so remarkable that it well deserves to be taken notice of on this Occasion; it is in his third Book of *Tusculan Questions*: *Si tales nos natura genuisset ut eam ipsam intueri & perspicere, eaque optima duce cursum vitæ conficere possemus, haud esset sanè quod quisquam rationem & doctrinam requireret*, &c. Where he observes, that *if we had come into the World in such Circumstances, that we could clearly see and discern Nature itself, and under its excellent Directions accomplish the Course of our Lives, there would have been no need of Learning or Instruction*: but he goes on to shew that this is not the case. He speaks of some *small Sparks or Seeds of Virtue implanted in us*, which are soon *extinguish'd*

tinguisb'd by corrupt Customs and Opinions, so that the Light of Nature no where appears, viz. in its Incorruption and Purity; from whence he infers the great Necessity and Usefulness of Philosophy to direct and to assist us; and it will conclude much more strongly for the Usefulness of a divine Revelation, which is much more advantageous, and more to be depended on.

And indeed though our Author sometimes speaks, as if he thought Men knew the whole of natural Religion by Intuition, or by a kind of inward Sense and Instinct, without any further Inquiry, yet at other times when he comes to explain himself, all that he seems to understand by the Law of Nature's being *implanted in the Hearts of all Men, impress'd on Men's Minds continually*, and the like Expressions, comes to no more than this, that all Men have natural Abilities, if they improve their Reason to the utmost, and use that Consideration and Reflection that becomes them in an Affair of such consequence, to find out the great Principles of natural Religion. Thus in his first Chapter, where he talks of the Law of Nature's being implanted in Man from the Beginning, he affirms that "it is only by making a
" due Use of our Reason, by our using our rational
" Faculties after the best manner we can, that we can
" come to understand the Law of Nature, p. 5, 6." And again, he calls it "an universal Law, given by the
" supreme Governor of Mankind to his Subjects,
" and which they when they come to the Use of
" their Reason are capable of knowing, p. 9*." So that this implanting and writing in the Hearts of all Men the Law of Nature, this impressing it daily on their Minds, and dictating it daily to them, (which he so often talks of) amounts to no more than this, that when they come to the Use of their Reason they are capable of knowing it; and this

they may be, and yet without particular Teaching and Instruction wou'd not actually know it; the Knowledge of it may notwithstanding this be attended with difficulty.

One of the ways our Author proposes, whereby the Bulk of Mankind may come to a right Knowledge of their Duty, is by a Consideration of the Divine Attributes. He observes, that “ the Knowledge of God lies at the Foundation of all Religion, and that to argue from the Divine Attributes is a most certain way of arguing; and therefore he directs us in the first place to get clear Ideas of God, especially of the moral Character of the Divine Being. For that Reason which gives us a Demonstration of the Divine Perfections, affords us the same concerning the Nature of those Duties God requires.” But are all these things so clear, that the Bulk of Mankind can easily discern them of themselves, without Assistance or Instruction? Must they be left, by the Dint of their own Reason, to work out the Demonstration of the Divine Attributes for themselves? Must every Man, the meanest of the People, be suppos'd to have such clear Notions of the Deity and of his glorious Perfections, as to know what Duties he requires; or is there any thing in which the Bulk of Mankind have been more generally wrong, and apt to entertain the most false and debasing Notions, than in what relates to the Deity, his Attributes, and the Worship and Service that it is proper to render to him?

But he thinks that all Persons may easily and safely argue from the divine Goodness, that here there is no difficulty. He tells us, “ There is none of the Questions, whether relating to God or Man, but what may be easily determin'd by considering which side of the Question carries with it the greatest Goodness, since the same Light of Reason
“ which

“ which shews us there is such a good Being, shews
“ us also what such Goodness expects, p. 75*.”
But it is not merely to be consider’d what carries with
it the greatest Goodness, but what is, all things to be
consider’d, most just, most wise, most worthy of
God; Wisdom and Justice are to be consider’d as
well as Goodness, and he that wou’d form to him-
self an Idea of God, merely under the Character of
a beneficent Being, wou’d form a very imperfect and
partial one. Besides, we may in many Instances be
easily mistaken in judging which side carries with it
the greatest Goodness. The Goodness of God *has*
a Relation to the Whole, as Lord Shaftesbury expres-
ses it in a Passage cited by this Author, p. 78†. And
is it so very easy to judge in all Cases what is for the
general Good of the Whole? May we not be partial
in our own Case, and judge by our own private
Good, and not the Good of the whole, what it is
that the Goodness of the Supreme Being leads him
to? External Revelation therefore may be of great
use, to let us know in many Cases how far his Good-
ness extends, and what it requires and expects. This
Author himself is a remarkable Instance how easily
Persons may be mistaken in arguing from the di-
vine Goodness, since the Inferences he draws from
it may be prov’d (as I hope to shew afterwards) to
be subversive of all Religion, and even of that Law
of Nature, which he pretends so much to magnify
and admire.

Another Rule this Gentleman proposes, by which the
People may easily judge of the whole of their Duty, is
by what tends to their own Happiness. “ The only in-
“ nate Principle (says he) in Man, is the Desire of his
“ own Happiness; and the Goodness of God requires
“ no more than a right cultivating this Principle, in
“ preferring a general or publick to a particular or
“ private Good: And where there are two Evils,
and

* P. 64.

† P. 67.

“ and both can’t be avoided, to chuse the less, *sub* “ *ratione boni*, p. 363 *.” These Things are easily said in general; but if we consider them more particularly and distinctly, we shall find several things here mention’d which are of no small difficulty. Not to inquire at present how far that is true which the Author here advances, that the only innate Principle in Man is the Desire of his own Happiness, it is not so very easy as he represents it to know which is the right way of cultivating this Principle. Nor is there any thing in which Men are more apt to be deceiv’d, nor concerning which they have form’d more wrong Notions, than wherein the true and proper Happiness of Man consists. Every one knows how the Heathen World were divided on this Head, and what a great Variety of Opinions there was amongst their wise Men and Philosophers themselves about it.

If the People shou’d come to the Author to know how they shall promote their Happiness, he directs them *so to regulate their natural Appetites, as will conduce most to the Exercise of their Reason, the Health of their Bodies, and the Pleasure of their Senses, taken and consider’d together, since therein their Happiness consists*, p. 17 *. And is it so very easy for the Vulgar to weigh and compare all these, and to form an exact Judgment accordingly? How much more easily and certainly might they find out their Duty and Happiness by some plain express Revelation from God, determining their Duty, and instructing them wherein true Happiness consists, and which is the best way to obtain it, than if they were left to themselves to collect it by considering and comparing all these? But besides this, he wou’d have ’em further to consider and *compare the general or publick with their own particular or private Good*, and to *prefer the former*. But if the *only innate Principle*

Principle in Man is the Desire of his own Happiness (as this Gentleman alledges) I don't see what Obligations a Man is under to prefer the general or publick to his own private Good, supposing these to come in competition; nor is it so very easy for the People to judge of what is for the general or publick Good, as I shall shew presently. Lastly, he wou'd have 'em *of two Evils to chuse the lesser sub ratione boni*. They must therefore exactly compare these two Evils, and pass a right Judgment concerning them; but what if they judge those to be the greatest Evils, which bring some present Inconvenience to their Bodies or Estates, as the Generality of Mankind are apt to do?

This Author himself is an Instance how easily this Rule may be mistaken. He allows Persons to tell a Falshood, in order to get rid of the *Impertinence* of inquisitive People; see p. 347*. He must therefore look upon it as a greater Evil to be teiz'd a little with the Forwardness of *impertinent* People than to tell a Lye, and therefore is for chusing the latter *sub ratione boni*. But many others think differently from him in this, and that to tell a Lye (which they look upon to be a moral Evil) is a greater Evil than to be subject to a little Inconvenience.

Another Rule this Author proposes is, that “ we can't but know, if we in the least consider, that “ whatever Circumstances Men are plac'd in by the “ universal Cause of all Things, 'tis his eternal and “ immutable Will by his placing them in those Circumstances, that they act as these require.” And he adds, that “ this Consideration alone will direct a “ Man how to act in all Conditions of Life.” Thus says he, “ we see how the Reason of Things, or the “ Relation they have to each other, teaches us our “ Duty in all Cases whatsoever, p. 19 †.” To the
same

* P. 315. † P. 16.

same purpose is his boasted Rule, the Usefulness of which he so highly extols, that "it is the Tendency of Actions which makes them good or bad; they that tend to promote human Happiness are always good; and those that have a contrary Influence are always bad. And 'tis the Circumstances Men are under, by which we are to judge of the Tendency of Actions, p. 345 *, &c."

These are the simple and easy Rules this Gentleman proposes, by which the Bulk of Mankind may easily and certainly know their Duty in all Cases whatsoever. As if it were sufficient only to tell them it is the Will of God they shou'd act as the Circumstances they are plac'd in do require, and then to leave them to find out of themselves as well as they can, what their several Circumstances demand and make it fit for them to do? But if every Man must be left to himself, to judge of what is good by what suits his own Circumstances, and what he apprehends for his own greater Pleasure, or Interest, or Gain in the Circumstances he is in, it wou'd soon introduce a very loose Morality.

But perhaps the other Rule he advances, p. 360 †. may prevent any ill Use that might be made of this; he wou'd have Men make "a Rule's being calculated for the general Good, the Test of its being the Will of God; and that this Rule, if observ'd, wou'd make the World happy, *ibid.*" But neither is this Rule so very clear and easy, as to afford a sufficient Direction to the Bulk of Mankind. It looks plausible in the general, but is not so clear and easy, when applied to particular Cases. Many have thought it for the general Good that Fornication shou'd be prohibited, others have pleaded for the Lawfulness of it; and it is very probable, from some Passages in his Book, that our Author thinks the latter are in the right. Some have thought that a
Community

* P. 312. † P. 326.

Community of Wives wou'd be for the general Good of the Commonwealth, (so thought the famous Philosopher *Plato*) others very justly have thought the contrary. Some have thought it for the general Good, that weak and sickly Children shou'd be expos'd, (as in the Commonwealth of *Sparta*) others very justly have look'd upon this as a very barbarous and inhuman Custom. Some have thought Self-murder in many Cases lawful, and even commendable, others have thought it for the general Good that no such thing shou'd be allow'd. Many have thought upon very good Reasons, that those Precepts of our Saviour concerning forgiving Injuries, and loving or doing good to our Enemies, are highly for the general Good of Mankind; but our Author seems to be of a contrary Opinion, p. 340, 341, 342*. Some have thought it for the general Good that all Men shou'd be brought to a strict Uniformity in Worship, and no Toleration allow'd to those of different Sentiments from the Religion of the State, which they thought made way for Seditions and Distractions; others have thought a Toleration of different Opinions, and a Liberty of professing them, for the publick Good. Many have thought it for the general Good that a Lye shou'd not be allow'd on any Occasion; others, and among the rest this Author, think that it may be for the general Good to transgress the Rules of Truth on several Occasions. It has been the common Opinion, that Virtue is for the general Good of Mankind; but there have not been wanting Men, and those too admir'd in this discerning Age, this Age of Liberty and Free-thought, that have made no scruple to assert, and have endeavour'd to prove, that Vice it self is for the general Good of the Community, and that *private Vices are publick Benefits*. Indeed it is certain in fact, that the Bulk of Mankind

if

* P. 308, 309.

if left to themselves to judge what is for the general Good, will not trouble themselves much about it; it is a thing that for the most part lies out of their reach, and of which they are not very competent Judges. It must therefore be a great Advantage not to have our Duty left thus at large, but particularly determin'd by God, who is a far better Judge than Man can pretend to be of what tends to the general Good, as he takes in the whole Compass of Things. And it must be a great Satisfaction, and of signal Benefit, to be inform'd by a Revelation from him what does so.

Upon the whole, what this Gentleman most frequently proposes as the Method by which all Mankind may easily and certainly come to the Knowledge of their Duty is, by *considering and comparing Things, and the Relations they stand in to one another*; it is by this we must judge *of the Fitness and Unfitness of Actions*; and he tells us, that by *considering the Relation we stand in to God and our Fellow-Creatures, and the Duties resulting from thence, we may know the whole of our Duty*, p. 28*. And is this so very easy a Work for the Generality of Mankind? They are to have a right Knowledge of God and his glorious Attributes and Perfections; they are to know themselves and the Relations they stand in to one another; they are to consider and compare these several Relations, and to know what they require. And is this a Work of no difficulty? Are all these Things self-evident? Or does it not require deep Attention and serious Thought? And has it not employ'd the most considering Men in all Ages to set these things in a proper Light? Do we not find in fact, that where no Care has been taken to instruct Men in these things, they are sunk into Barbarism, and amazingly ignorant of God and their Duty in many important Instances? Are all these things so plain,

plain, that Men need no Instruction, no Assistance to a right Discernment of them? or does he know human Nature that talks at this rate?

This Writer cites many Passages from several Authors, to shew the Clearness of the Law of Nature; and particularly he has a long one from Mr. *Barbeyrac*, p. 296, 297*. which he represents as containing a *Recapitulation* or Summary of what he had been advancing. Mr. *Barbeyrac* there says amongst other things, that “ the *Stoicks*, who made Morality their principal Study, maintain’d that their Philosophy was not above the reach of Women and Slaves.” But then they did not suppose it so plain, that those Women and Slaves needed not to be instructed in it; they thought the Writings of Philosophers, particularly their own, very useful. For why did they write Books, but to instruct Mankind in their Duty? Many things appear very plain and clear, when once Men are instructed in them, which yet they wou’d never have found out of themselves without such Instruction. Besides, I think it might easily be shewn, that the *Stoick* Philosophy was not so very clear and obvious to the Vulgar. It was in some things false, and in others very obscure, as many have shewn, particularly *Plutarch* in his two Treatises against the *Stoicks*.

I grant what Mr. *Barbeyrac* there says, that “ the natural Principles of the Science of Morality, are such as are proportionate to the Capacities of all Sorts of Persons; that is, they are such as they are capable of understanding, when clearly explain’d and laid before them: and yet this does not prove but that they may have great need of Teaching and Instruction. Besides, supposing the main Principles of that Science clear, are the Conclusions from those Principles equally evident, in which yet the greatest Part of practical Morality does consist? He tells us indeed,

* P. 268, 269.

indeed, that “ the Idea of a Creator, boundless in
 “ Power, Wisdom and Goodness, and the Idea of
 “ ourselves, as intelligent, reasonable and sociable
 “ Creatures, these two Ideas well look’d into and
 “ compared together in their whole Extent, will
 “ always furnish us with steady Grounds of Duty,
 “ and sure Rules of Conduct, &c.” But the two
 Ideas he mentions are very complex, and comprehend a great deal under them; the Ideas of God and of the divine Attributes, and of our own Intelligence, Rationality, Sociality, &c. are not so very obvious to the Generality of Mankind, that if left to themselves they wou’d easily form just Notions concerning them, much less *compare them together in their whole Extent*, as *Barbeyrac* requires. Is this a Task so easy for the Vulgar, even for those of the meanest Capacities, and that cannot so much as read in their Mother-Tongue, that they may understand them all without difficulty, merely by their own Study and the Force of their own Reason? Are these Things so plain, that all Treatises of Morality are needless? Or are not those very Treatises where these Things are argued from their Principles, for the most part above the Capacity of the Vulgar, who can much more easily understand the plain and simple Precepts of Holy Writ, than the abstract Reasonings of the Moralists, though ready prepared to their hand? Much less wou’d they be able to reason these Things out to themselves by their own natural Sagacity, without further Assistance. Though therefore, as *Barbeyrac* there says, “ God’s Laws
 “ are not environ’d with such Obscurity as cannot
 “ be penetrated by one who really has his Duty at
 “ heart, notwithstanding all his Pains and Application;” yet since, taking Mankind as they are, they are not generally fitted for such deep Inquiries or such Application as is necessary, it is a great Advantage to have an external Revelation from God to
 discover

discover to them their Duty, which in this Method they may come to know far more clearly, and easily, and certainly, than if they had been left to collect it every Man for himself by his own proper Study and Application. And accordingly *Barbeyrac* himself, in the Passage here cited by our Author, mentions it to the glory of the Gospel-Revelation, that it has brought a clear Discovery of pure Morals.

And now since it has been shewn, that Men do not know the Law of Nature in its just Extent merely by a natural Sense and Intuition, and that the Principles and Obligations of that Law do not come in with an irresistible Light and Evidence; since the Author himself, though he sometimes speaks as if he thought all Men knew the whole Law of Nature naturally and necessarily, yet at other times plainly supposes that it is by attentive Consideration, by considering and comparing the Relations of Things, and the Fittests arising from them, that they must come to know that Law; since it appears that the Generality of Mankind are little fitted for such Inquiries; that they are so little used to abstract Speculations, and have so little Leisure for them, and are under the power of such Prejudices, that it can scarce ordinarily be expected, but that, if left merely to themselves, they must be ignorant of some Things that are of consequence to their Duty and their Happiness; and since it is plain in fact, that where Men have been left merely to themselves, they have scarce ever made a right Use of their Reason for finding out the main Principles of natural Religion; since all this is manifest, and hath been sufficiently prov'd, it must be own'd that the bulk of Mankind stand in need of particular Instruction, and consequently that the World wou'd be under great Obligations to any that shou'd endeavour to recover them to a right Knowledge of God and of their Duty. This Writer, it is to be presum'd, will grant this,

since this is the professed Design of his whole Book, which he himself thinks a very laudable Attempt, and seems to expect that others shou'd think so too. And he says *we are infinitely oblig'd to the Philosophers for writing as they have done*, that is, for endeavouring to assist Men in the right Knowledge of the Law of Nature, and to inspire them with worthy Notions of God, and ingage them to the Practice of Virtue. And if their Attempts, notwithstanding the suppos'd Sufficiency of the Light of Nature, were neither needless nor useless; I think this Author must own, if he be consistent with himself, that if God shou'd condescend to send some Persons in his Name, on purpose to instruct Mankind in a far better Manner, and with more Certainty and Authority than the Philosophers did, and to recover them out of that Darkness and Superstition in which they were involv'd; and if, in order to awaken the Attention of Mankind, and procure a greater regard to the Instructions given by these Men in his Name, he shou'd enable them to perform many illustrious Miracles, plainly exceeding human Power, and bearing upon them the Characters of a divine Power and Goodness; if he shou'd do this, we must be under great Obligations to the divine Goodness, and ought to accept and acknowledge the Benefit with the highest Thankfulness to God, and a due Regard to the Instruments made use of in this excellent Work. And it is evident that on such a View of Things, such an external Revelation wou'd be neither needless nor useless. And since the Author represents it as *the Business of the Christian Dispensation to restore, free from all Idolatry, the true primitive and natural Religion implanted in Mankind from the Creation*, p. 379. * this ought (if he were sincere in this Acknowledgment) highly to recommend it to his Esteem: but whether he be or not, 'tis certain this

was

* P. 343.

was one noble Design and Effect of it. Where Christianity came, the Pagan Superstition and Idolatry, which was so firmly establish'd, and had prevail'd for so many Ages, fled before it. Great Numbers of the People were turn'd from worshipping vain Idols to the living and true God, and from all the barbarous and impure Rites to which they were so strongly addicted, to a pure and simple and spiritual Adoration; and from those vicious Excesses in which they freely indulg'd themselves before, to an exemplary Purity of Heart and Behaviour. Other Means had been long tried in vain; Philosophy had been tried to the utmost for many Ages, and found ineffectual. Those wise Men never converted so much as a single Village from Superstition and Idolatry. And indeed how cou'd it be expected they shou'd, when they themselves fell in with the common Superstition, and either were ignorant of the Evil of it, or were afraid of exposing themselves to danger by opposing it? Thus Superstition and Corruption still grew and prevail'd, and both had arriv'd to the height when Christianity appear'd. And if Mankind had been left merely to themselves, to the Force of their own Reason, to break thro' all those Prejudices, and recover the primitive Religion, or if they had been left merely to the Instructions of their own Philosophers, their wise Men and Law-givers, Paganism in all probability wou'd have continued to this day. 'Tis evident there needed others of greater Influence than the Philosophers to reform Mankind, and reclaim them from their Superstition and Idolatry and Corruption of Manners. And what greater Influence cou'd they hope for, unless animated by a divine Power, endued with an heroick Fortitude, and producing the evident Proofs of an Authority and Commission from above? Such were the Apostles, whose Instructions accordingly immediately produc'd the most wonderful Effects for

rescuing Mankind from the miserable Superstition they were under. Instructed by them, thousands of the meanest of the People were brought to entertain just Notions of God and of his Attributes, and of the great Duties of Morality, and of a future State; and the Revelation they brought, and which is contain'd in the Holy Scriptures, still is the best Security against the Return or Prevalency of Idolatry and Superstition. 'Tis true there has been in fact a great Corruption among Christians themselves; Superstition and Idolatry has been in effect introduc'd under a Christian Name: but it does not follow that the Corruption of Christians wou'd be as good an Argument for a new Revelation to them, as the Corruption and Superstition of Pagans was for the Expediency of an external Revelation for recovering them out of their Superstition; because whilst the Christian Revelation does subsist in the Holy Scriptures, Men may easily, by having recourse to it, discover and reject all the corrupt Additions that have been made to it; even the meanest of the People, by reading the Scriptures, may distinguish between true Religion and Superstition, incomparably better and more easily than they cou'd if left merely to their own Reason without it. Thus we find in fact it was at the Reformation; the People, by reading the Scriptures, were enabled to throw off the Yoke of Superstition and Idolatry, from which otherwise, if left to themselves, they wou'd not have recover'd; and therefore in Popish Countries, it is a wise part of their Policy to hinder the Laity from reading the Scriptures.

Thus have I consider'd the Clearness of the Law of Nature, with respect to the Duties there requir'd; and have shewn, that though those Duties be in themselves most reasonable, and founded in the Nature of Things, yet they are not so clear to the Generality of Mankind in their present State, as to render

an external Revelation useleſs, and that by the help of ſuch a Revelation they may more eaſily and certainly come to a right Knowledge of thoſe Duties and Obligations, than if every Man was left to collect his Duty himſelf by the mere Force of his own Reaſon, without ſuch Aſſiſtance.



CHAP. VI.

That there are ſome Things of great Importance to us to know, particularly relating to the Methods of our Reconciliation with God when we have offended him, and the Reward to be conferr'd on imperfect Obedience, which cannot be certainly known by the mere Light of Nature without Revelation.

THOUGH we ſhou'd ſuppoſe the great Principles and Duties of Morality to be never ſo clear and evident to the Bulk of Mankind, yet there are other things which it is of conſiderable Importance to us to have a clear and ſatisfying Knowledge and Aſſurance of, and with reſpect to which an external Revelation might be of ſignal Uſe. It cannot be denied that in the preſent State of the World and of Mankind, we ſtand in need of many powerful Motives to engage us to the Practice of thoſe moral Duties that are incumbent upon us, from which we are often in danger of being diſcourag'd by the many Difficulties we meet with, and of being drawn aſide by the Strength of our Appetites and Paſſions, by the Views of Intereſt, by the Allurements of Pleaſure, by the Influence of corrupt Cuſtoms, &c. It is therefore of great conſequence to us to be certainly inform'd of thoſe Things, which

if known must needs have a mighty Influence to engage us to our Duty, to deter us from Vice, and to encourage and animate us to the practice of Virtue. Of this kind is the Doctrine of the Rewards to be conferr'd upon the Righteous, and the Punishments to be inflicted on the Wicked, in a future State. Some Apprehensions of this matter have indeed obtain'd very generally amongst Mankind; but when we consider the dark Surmises about these things, and the strange Notions of that future Happiness or Misery that obtain'd amongst the Heathens, mix'd with many absurd Fables; when we consider the many Difficulties rais'd on this Subject by the Pretenders to Reason; that many of the Philosophers absolutely denied a future State, that others doubted of it, and regarded it as altogether uncertain; and that even most of those that asserted it advanc'd it only as a probable Conjecture; and though sometimes they seem to be perswaded of it, at other times speak of it in a manner that shews they had still some Suspicions about it; when we consider all this, which has been often represented at large by those that have treated this Subject, it must be own'd that an express Revelation from God himself, assuring us of a future State, discovering to us the Nature of that Happiness, and wherein it consists, as also what the Punishments are that shall be inflicted on the Wicked, wou'd be of signal Use to Mankind: Since these Things, where they are firmly believ'd, must needs have a mighty Influence to deter and restrain Men from their vicious Courses, and to engage them to the steady Practice of Righteousness, in opposition to the many Temptations and Discouragements they now meet with.

But let us suppose that Reason alone, without the Assistance of Revelation, might give us an absolute Certainty of a future eternal Happiness to be conferr'd upon all those that yield a perfect Obedience

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to the divine Law ; yet what shall be done to those who are conscious to themselves that they fall short in many Instances ? Must they also expect a future eternal Reward, as well as if they had perfectly obey'd and fulfilled the Law ? Here therefore another Question arises of great Importance to us to to have clearly decided ; and that is, what Methods God will take with Creatures that have transgressed his Law ; whether and upon what Terms he will pardon their Iniquities ; whether he will reward even their imperfect Obedience, and if he will, what kind of Reward he will confer ? For though we shou'd suppose the Light of Nature to discover to all Men the Precepts and Obligations of the divine Law, so clearly and plainly that no Man can be ignorant of his Duty, yet if it leaves us in the dark or under Uncertainties, what God will do and what Methods he will take with Creatures that have transgress'd his Law, which we are all conscious to ourselves we have done, this alone wou'd shew an external Revelation to be of great Use.

The Method this Author proposes, as what is very evident from the Light of Nature, is that God will most certainly pardon Sinners upon their Repentance ; that is, that he will pardon all Sinners, at all Times, let their Sins have been ever so heinous, or aggravated, or frequently repeated ; and not only pardon, but reward them, merely and immediately upon their Repentance, without any other Provision made for the vindicating the Authority of his Government and Laws. And in order to judge of this, I shall first lay down some Principles that ought to be consider'd on this Subject.

And first this Author himself tells us, and it is a Principle I shall take for granted, that “ none who
“ believe there's a God who governs Mankind, but
“ must believe he has given them a Law for govern-
“ ing their Actions, and that this is imply'd in the

“ very Notion of Governor and Governed, p. 10*.” And the same Light of Nature that tells us, that God hath given a Law to Mankind for governing their Actions, does also shew that Men are under the highest Obligations to govern their Actions by that Law; and that to transgress the Law of our Creator is a very great Evil, and a manifest Breach of all the Rules of Order; it is an Insurrection against the highest Authority and against the greatest Goodness; against the Will and Law of the supreme Lord, the great Benefactor and Parent of the Universe; that therefore this is a Crime which in its own Nature deserves Punishment, and that consequently by a Constitution founded in the *very Nature and Reason of Things*, (to use this Author’s Expressions) upon Man’s transgressing the Law of his Creator, there immediately results a Guilt on Man’s part, or an Obligation or Obnoxiousness to Punishment; that consequently it wou’d be just in God to punish it. Indeed otherwise there wou’d be no Room or Exercise for Pardon at all. For Pardon is the Remission of the Penalty that is suppos’d to be in justice due. And if Sin did not, in its own nature, deserve Punishment, it wou’d be unjust to punish any Sin at any time, whether the Sinner persisted in it, or repented of it, or not. This then is suppos’d in the present Question, that Sin renders the Sinner justly obnoxious to Punishment.

Another Principle here suppos’d is, that God is a Being of infinite Purity and impartial Justice and Righteousness, who as he has an eternal Love of Order and Rectitude, so is carried by the Perfection of his own most excellent Nature to hate all moral Evil; and therefore it may be justly expected that he will manifest his Displeasure against it, in that way and manner which he, in his infinite Wisdom and Righteousness, sees most proper. It strengthens
this,

this, when it is further consider'd, that as God is to be regarded as the righteous Governor of the World, so the infinite Perfection of his Nature, whereby he always acts in a manner most becoming his own glorious Excellencies, and agreeably to the Reason and Nature of Things, obliges him to do every thing that is proper to fulfil that Character; and though he cannot be strictly and properly a Debtor to his Creatures, yet by entring into the Relation of a moral Governor, and giving them Laws, he becomes as it were a Debtor to the Community, and the Guardian of those Laws; and therefore owes it to himself and to the Community to take the most proper Measures to vindicate those Laws from Contempt. This is not only fit and just in it self, and agreeable to the Reason of Things, but is necessary to preserve the Peace and Order and Harmony of the moral World, which very much depends on maintaining a due Reverence for his divine Majesty, and keeping up the Authority of his Laws, and consequently a Horror of Sin in the Minds of his Creatures. 'Tis true, the Light of Nature leads us to conclude that God is merciful; but then it is also evident, and this Author owns it, that the Acts of his Mercy are govern'd by his infinite Wisdom; and that therefore his Mercy must be exercis'd only so far and no farther than is consistent with his essential Purity, with his rectoral Wisdom and Righteousness as he is the great Governor of the World, with the Regard due to his Authority and Laws, and with the publick Good, the universal Order and Harmony of the rational Creation; all these things must come into Consideration, in order to decide the present Question. And these are things so much above us, that it wou'd be great presumption to determine positively concerning them. A divine Revelation therefore must certainly be of vast advantage in this regard.

It is certain that in human Governments, in many Cases, Repentance alone is not sufficient to avert the Penalty; and that it is often fit and necessary to punish an Offender against the Laws, and to cause him to undergo the legal Punishment of his Offence, notwithstanding he sincerely repents of what he has done: and I believe none will pretend to advance it for a stated Maxim, that as often as ever Criminals repent, let their Crimes have been never so heinous and aggravated, often repeated and insolently committed, yet the Magistrate should be obliged to pardon and restore them to Favour barely and immediately upon their Repentance, without any other Provision for vindicating the Authority of the Government and Laws.

If it be said this would not be proper in human Governments, because they may easily be deceiv'd with false Shews of Repentance: I answer, that supposing human Governors could certainly distinguish a true Repentance from a false one, the Inconvenience of such a Constitution to the Publick would still be the same. For it would encourage Persons to commit Crimes, in hopes of doing it with Impunity, since every Criminal would think, that in order to escape Punishment he had nothing more to do but to repent, and that this alone would fully satisfy the Law, and he would be apt to flatter himself that this was at any time in his own power. And can any Reason be assign'd why such a Constitution, which would be foolish and pernicious in a human Government, would be wise and proper in the divine? The Gospel indeed promises Forgiveness to the greatest of Sinners, upon their sincere Repentance. But then it must be consider'd that we are at the same time instructed there, that even our Repentance is not accepted without such a Propitiation of an extraordinary nature offer'd on our behalf, as makes a most awful Declaration of God's Justice and Detestation

Detestation against Sin, and tends to vindicate the Authority of his Government and Laws. And besides this, the Time of our Repentance is there limited to this present Life or State of Trial, which considering the Shortness and Uncertainty of this Life, is a Consideration of the highest Moment. But if we should suppose that there are no Limits at all, but that whenever and as often soever as Sinners repent, not only in this Life, but to all Eternity, let their Crimes have been ever so heinous and aggravated and long persisted in, they must be pardon'd and accepted, and even raised to the highest Glory and Felicity, barely and immediately upon their Repentance, without any further Provision made for vindicating the divine Authority, or declaring God's rectoral Justice; this would effectually vacate the Authority of the divine Government and Laws; it would, instead of being a sufficient Determent from Crimes, be the greatest Encouragement to commit them; it would take away the Fear of God and the Dread of Punishment, which are the most effectual Restraints to Vice and Wickedness, and would therefore be of the worst consequence to the Peace and Order of the moral World. Reason therefore leads us to conclude, that there must be some Bounds and Limits set to the Forgiveness of Sin, and that it must be dispensed in such a way as may best secure the great Ends of Government, and the Regard due to God's supreme Authority; but then it cannot pretend certainly to determine, if left merely to itself, without divine Revelation, what those Bounds and Limits are, or what it is that God the most wise and righteous Governor of the World may see to be fit and necessary for the Vindication of his own Authority and Laws. This depends on Things which we through the Narrowness of our Views are not very proper Judges of.

Sup-

Supposing we have ground to hope that God will pardon Sin upon Repentance, yet still if left to our selves we might be greatly at a loss to know how far this Pardon shall extend; whether only to some few Sins, and those of a less heinous nature, or even to those Sins that are of great Malignity and high Aggravations, especially if frequently repeated and long persisted in; whether it may not seem fit to God to punish such Sins in an awful manner, even notwithstanding the Repentance of the Sinner, the more effectually to deter others from presuming to offend with hope of Impunity: or if he will shew mercy to such Sinners upon their Repentance, how far this Mercy shall extend, whether so far as to entitle them to a Reward, or only to a Mitigation of the Punishment, by remitting of the Rigor of the Penalty that is due. Indeed supposing such Sinners should yield a perfect Obedience to the divine Law for the time to come, I can't see that we could have a full Assurance by the mere Light of Nature, that God would absolutely free them from the whole of that Penalty they had incurr'd by their former heinous Transgressions, much less that he would gloriously reward them, and give them the highest Marks of his Favour. But if we suppose (which is the true State of the Case) that their Obedience even after their Repentance is still very imperfect, and attended with many Defects; that they still fall short in many Instances of what the Law requires, and of what they themselves are sensible they might have done, if they did all that was absolutely in their power; what Assurance can we have by the mere Light of Nature, that God will not only accept that imperfect Obedience of theirs as a sufficient Compensation for their past heinous Offences, but that he will also reward it in a glorious manner with that eternal Life and Happiness which the Law promises to those that perfectly obey? Must those that have grievously sinn'd,
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and who even after their Repentance are conscious to themselves that they fall short in many Instances, expect a future eternal glorious Reward, as well as if they had perfectly obey'd and fulfill'd the whole Law? 'Tis evident that no Man can expect or demand such a Reward by virtue of the original Law itself; no Man therefore can say there is any thing in the Nature or Reason of Things to oblige God to confer such a Reward upon such Persons, or from whence it can be certainly concluded that he will do so. If therefore he does it at all, it must be by an Act of sovereign Grace and Mercy, an Act of pure Prerogative; and how far and in what manner and upon what terms he will exercise his Prerogative, lies in his own sacred Breast, upon a full View of what is most becoming his own glorious Excellencies, most for the Honour of his Government, and for the Vindication of his own Authority, and for the publick Good. It must therefore be an unspeakable Comfort and Satisfaction if God himself should please to reveal his own Counsels, and declare to us what Course, what Method of Proceedure he will take in this Case, how far he will pardon penitent Sinners, and whether he will reward their Repentance and imperfect Obedience, and what kind of Reward he will confer.

Let us now see what our Author has to offer on this Subject. Having cited a Passage from Dr. *Clark*, "that there arises to Nature no sufficient Comfort to Sinners, but an anxious and endless Solicitude, about the means of appeasing the Deity, p. 390*." He produces two Passages in answer to it, one from Mr. *Nye*, the other from Mr. *Locke*, which I shall take the liberty to examine, since in this Case we are to be determin'd by Reason, not by the Authority of Men, however great and learned. Though if it were to be determin'd by Authority, more might be

be produced on the other side. And this is one Instance among many, to shew that what this Gentleman supposes to be clearly founded in the very Nature and Reason of Things is not so very plain and obvious, but that Men of great Penetration differ very much in their Sentiments about it, though none that acknowledge the Gospel-Revelation can doubt whether it be reveal'd there, that God will pardon penitent Sinners, and give them eternal Life.

Mr. Nye, it must be own'd, expresses himself very strongly. "I affirm (says he) it is an Article of
 " natural Religion, that Forgiveness does certainly
 " follow Repentance. If God be a merciful and
 " benign Being, he will accept the Payment we are
 " able to make; and not insist on impossible De-
 " mands with his frail bankrupt Creatures. No ge-
 " nerous Man, but will forgive his Enemy, much
 " more his Child; if he disapproves the Wrong he
 " has done, is really griev'd for it, is desirous to
 " make amends even by suffering for the Honour
 " of the Person injur'd. How much more shall
 " God forgive all Persons thus disposed and re-
 " formed; since there's no Generosity in Man, but
 " what is, with his Nature, infused into him by God?

This way of arguing seems plausible at first view, but if closely examined, has several Flaws in it. One general Remark I would make upon what Mr. Nye advances, and it may be equally applied to what Mr. Locke offers, is this: When he tells us *Forgiveness does certainly follow Repentance*, he does not tell us how far this Forgiveness is to extend; whether it holds in all Cases and at all Times, as often soever as Sinners repent throughout Eternity; or whether there are to be certain Bounds and Limits set, beyond which Sinners are not to hope for Forgiveness, even though they should repent; yet these Things must be discuss'd, in order to judge aright in this Question. To say there are no Limits at all, is con-
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trary to Reason, as I have already shewn; but if there be Limits, then this is to leave the Sinner under Doubts and Jealousies; and the more sensible he is of his Crimes, that is, the truer Penitent he is, the more apt he will be to give way to such Fears and Jealousies.

I don't well know what Mr. Nye means by saying, "if God be a merciful and benign Being, he will accept the Payment we are able to make, and not insist on impossible Demands with his frail bankrupt Creatures." What are we to understand here by *impossible Demands*? Is this to be applied to the Obedience requir'd, or the Punishment to be inflicted? The former is not to the purpose; because the Question is concerning those that have fallen short of that Obedience which they are sensible they might have render'd, and who have transgress'd the Divine Law in Instances in which they had it in their power to have done otherwise. But the Demand we are now speaking of, which God has upon guilty Creatures that have offended him, and transgress'd his righteous Laws, is that of Punishment; and is God's insisting upon their being punish'd, insisting upon *impossible Demands*? or, in other words, is it impossible they shou'd be punish'd? This indeed wou'd put an end to the Controversy. When the Sins are once committed, it is impossible they shou'd be uncommitted; but this is not what God requires: but it is very possible for them to be punish'd for what they have committed; and this is the present Question.

Another Remark I wou'd make upon this Reasoning is, that he confounds the Sins committed against God with private Offences committed by one Man against another; and argues from the Forgiveness of the latter to that of the former. But there is a vast and almost infinite Difference. Apply Mr. Nye's Reasoning to an earthly Magistrate, and the
Fallacy

Fallacy of it immediately appears. Will it follow that because there is no generous Man but will forgive his Enemy, much more his Child, if he disapproves the Wrong he hath done, is really griev'd for it, &c. will it follow that therefore a Magistrate must be oblig'd in all Cases to forgive those that have violated the Laws, when they sincerely repent of what they have done? Wou'd not Mercy in many Cases, even where there is reason to think the Criminal sincerely repents, be an Injury to the Publick? And if a Magistrate shou'd lay it down as a Rule to himself to pardon all that he has reason to think are truly griev'd for what they have done, &c. instead of commending his Generosity, wise Men wou'd arraign his Wisdom and Justice, and think him not very fit to govern. Now God cannot possibly be regarded as a private Being. As he is the greatest and best of Beings, who comprehends eminently in himself all the Perfection and Excellency that is in the whole Creation, and infinitely more; so he is the supreme and rightful Governor of the World, the great Guardian of universal Order and of the Laws. This is an Idea inseparable from the Deity; and therefore a Sin against God cannot be regarded as a private Offence of one Man against another, but as a Breach of publick Order; an Act of Disobedience to the supreme universal Lord, and is virtually an Attempt against the Peace, Order, and Harmony of the whole Creation. There is therefore no certain arguing from the Conduct that becomes us towards our Fellow-Creatures that have injur'd us, to the Conduct that becomes the sovereign Lord of the Universe, towards his sinful Creatures that have transgress'd his Laws, and despis'd his Authority. 'Tis true our Saviour directs us to beg of God to forgive us our Trespases as we forgive them that have trespass'd against us; the principal Design of which Words is to signify to us, that our forgiving others is a
necessary

necessary Condition of our obtaining Forgiveness of God; for so our Saviour himself explains it, *Mat.* 6. 14, 15. but he is far from intending to insinuate, that there is an exact Parallel between the Offences done by one Man to another, and the Sins committed against God. And if God allows us, notwithstanding the infinite difference there is between the Cases, to make use of our forgiving others, as a Plea for Pardon, and as an Encouragement to hope that he will also forgive us, it is wonderful Condescension, and to be acknowledg'd with the highest Thankfulness. But then it is evident that we cou'd not have used this Plea upon such sure Grounds, and with such a firm Faith and Confidence, if God himself had not encourag'd us to do so by an express Revelation. Let a Criminal know a wise and just Magistrate to be never so good and merciful, benign and generous, this can never be an Assurance to him that his Crime, if it be a heinous one, and such as the Laws condemn and punish, shall be pass'd by with Impunity; but rather the Uprightness and excellent Character of the Magistrate may make him apprehend that he will think it necessary for the public Good, and for preserving the Authority of the Laws, to punish him even tho' he testify his Repentance for his Crime. In like manner there is no arguing from mere Mercy in God, except it be also agreeable to his infinite Wisdom and Righteousness.

But Mr. Nye goes on, as cited by this Author;
“ Not only Mercy but Wisdom will effectually dis-
“ pose God to forgive the Penitent, because the Crea-
“ ture reform'd by Penitence, is such as it ought to
“ be, and as God willeth it; the which being so,
“ it can be no Wisdom in God to afflict it unneces-
“ sarily. 'Tis not Justice but Rage to punish where
“ the Person is already mended.” But as the former Argument proceeded upon a wrong Supposition, as if Sins against God were in the nature of

private Offences, so this proceeds upon a Supposition equally groundless, and that is, that the only End divine Wisdom has or can have in View in punishing a Creature, is to reform that particular Creature. His Ends in inflicting Punishments are far more extensive. They are inflicted not merely for the sake of that particular Creature that offends, but for the publick Good, which is to be preferr'd before that of any Individual; and for vindicating his own sacred Authority, and preserving a due Reverence to his Laws, and a deep Sense of the Evil of Sin, in the Minds of his Creatures. And in this Case the Good of that particular Creature must give way to those superior Considerations, drawn from the Honour of God, and the Good of the Whole. To say therefore, that *it is not Justice but Rage, to punish where the Person is already mended*, is a very rash and uncautious Assertion. Apply this to human Governments, and the Falshood of it is evident. Let us suppose a Criminal that has been guilty of some heinous Crime to be truly penitent, will any say that if the Magistrate shou'd punish him, it wou'd not be Justice but Rage? Yea though he certainly knew him to be reform'd, yet the publick Good might make it necessary that he shou'd suffer the Penalty of the Law; and the Magistrate might be very culpably wanting to the Duty of his Office, if he pass'd it by with Impunity. The Word *Rage* still goes upon the Notion of Revenge for a private Injury. But our Author, who elsewhere talks of *punishing not for punishing sake*, ought to be able to distinguish between Rage and Justice. Can that be call'd Rage, which engages a wise and just Magistrate to punish a Breach of the Laws, out of Regard to the Authority of the Law, to Justice, and the publick Good, and for answering the valuable Ends of Government? Is it Rage that inclines him to prefer all these to the private Advantage of the offending Person? It may be

be more justly said, that in many Cases to pass by the Violation of the Laws with Impunity, wou'd not be the Clemency or Wisdom of a just Governor, but a culpable Softness, or a partial Fondness for the Criminal.

Mr. *Nye* concludes thus; “ When we argue thus
“ from any of the known and certain Attributes
“ of God, we are as sure of the Conclusion, as if
“ the Thing was to be discern'd by Sense, since no
“ sensible thing is more certain than the Attributes
“ of God.” But I think his own Reasoning here is one Instance among many how easily Men may be mistaken, when they think they argue from the known Attributes of God, but in Reality only argue from their own mistaken Apprehensions of them. The truth is, the present Question depends upon Things we are little acquainted with, the Nature and Ends of the Divine Government, how far and in what Instances it is fit for God to exercise his Justice or his Mercy, and what it is proper for infinite Wisdom to do in the Government of the moral World; Things very remote from our Apprehensions, and in which we may be easily mistaken through the Narrowness of our Views, and for want of comprehending the whole Scheme of things, in their full Harmony and just Proportions.

Let us now examine what Mr. *Locke* says to the same purpose, as quoted by the Author. He first says, “ God had by the Light of Reason reveal'd
“ to all Mankind, who wou'd make use of that Light,
“ that he was good and merciful.” This is very true; but he had also revealed to them by the same Light, that he was just and wise and holy, a Hater and Punisher of Sin; and though they might know in general, that he is good and merciful, yet how far his Mercy wou'd extend, how far and in what Instances he wou'd pardon Sin, and when and how far he wou'd think fit to punish it, they had nothing in the Light of Nature to give 'em a cer-

tain Information. Mr. *Locke* goes on, “ The same
“ Spark of the Divine Nature and Knowledge in
“ Man, which making him a Man shew’d him
“ the Law he was under as a Man, shew’d him also
“ the way of atoning the merciful, kind, compas-
“ sionate Author and Father of him and his Being,
“ when he had transgress’d that Law. He that
“ made use of this Candle of the Lord so far as to
“ find what was his Duty, cou’d not miss to find
“ also the way to Reconciliation and Forgiveness,
“ when he had fail’d of his Duty.” This is very
handsomely express’d, but if narrowly examin’d is
not so solid. *The same Spark of the Divine Nature
and Knowledge in Man, which shew’d him the Law
he was under as a Man, did also shew him the Evil
of transgressing that Law, and the Punishment he
justly incurr’d by it; as it made him sensible that
he was under the highest Obligations to obey God,
and observe the Law he had given him, so also that
to sin presumptuously against the Sovereign Lord of
the Universe involv’d him under so heinous a Guilt,
that it wou’d be just in God to punish it with seve-
rity; and therefore cou’d not but make him afraid,
when he had violated the Law given him as the
Rule of his Duty, lest a righteous God shou’d in-
flict the Punishment which he was conscious he had
deserv’d; it made him regard God indeed as the
merciful, kind, compassionate Author and Father of
him and his Being, but it also caus’d him to regard
him as the most wise, holy, and just Governor of
the World, who as he has given a Law to Man-
kind for the Rule of their Actions, will be their
Judge to call them to an Account for their Viola-
tion of that Law, and will vindicate his own Law
and Authority from Contempt. ’Tis true that na-
tural Light wou’d direct a Man to do all he cou’d
to atone his Judge; and might give him some
Ground of Hope, that his Repentance wou’d be of
some*

some avail, at least to mitigate the Rigour of the Penalty; but it cou'd not, if left to it self, give a satisfying Assurance that God wou'd absolutely pardon all Sins upon Repentance, how heinous soever, though frequently repeated and long persisted in, and restore the guilty Transgressors to Favour, much less that he wou'd confer a glorious Reward upon them; it wou'd still leave room for many anxious Fears, and afford no sufficient Comfort to appease the Clamours of an awakened Conscience, and to remove the Jealousies of a guilty Mind. For the Acts of the Divine Mercy are not necessary, but govern'd in their Exercise by rectoral Wisdom and Righteousness, and what these may require we cannot of our selves pretend certainly to determine.

Mr. *Locke* goes on, " The Law is the eternal immutable Standard of Right, and a Part of that Law is, that a Man shou'd forgive not only his Children, but his Enemies upon their Repentance, asking Pardon, and Amendment." But it is no part of that Law that a Magistrate shou'd be oblig'd absolutely to pardon all the Crimes even of those that are truly penitent; this Law does not at all hinder the Magistrate from discharging his Office in punishing Crimes for the publick Good, though to the particular Damage and Hurt of the Offender. Yea, the very Law of Nature requires this. Nor is the Criminals asking pardon, repenting, and amending, always a sufficient Reason why they shou'd not be punish'd; but it may often be proper and necessary, for many valuable Ends, that they shou'd be punish'd, notwithstanding such Repentance and Amendment. Mr. *Locke* adds, " And therefore he cou'd not doubt, that the Author of this Law, and God of Patience and Consolation, who is rich in Mercy, wou'd forgive his frail Offspring, if they acknowledg'd their Faults, disapprov'd the Iniquity of their Transgressions, begg'd his

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“ pardon, and resolv’d in earnest for the future to
“ conform their Actions to this Rule, which they
“ own’d to be just and right; this Way of Recon-
“ ciliation, this Hope of Atonement, the Light of
“ Nature reveal’d to them.” But it does not fol-
low that the Author of this Law (which tho’ it
obliges private Persons to forgive the private Inju-
ries of those that repent, yet does not oblige Ma-
gistrates always to pardon Criminals even when they
are truly penitent:) I say it does not follow that the
Author of this Law, who is himself to be consider’d
as the great Governor of the World, will in all Cases
forgive the Transgressions of his Law even to the
truly Penitent. He does not by ordering his Crea-
tures to forgive private Injuries, bind himself as the
great Ruler of the World, not to vindicate his own
Authority by punishing the presumptuous Tran-
sgressions of his Law; or to pass by those Transgres-
sions with Impunity: nor does the Repentance of the
Transgressors bar him from insisting on such a Repa-
ration as is proper for securing the Majesty of his
Law, and the Authority of his Government. Tho’
the Author of this Law be the Parent of Mankind,
it does not follow that he must absolutely forgive
all their Sins upon Repentance. In human Govern-
ments, where the same Person is a Parent and a Ma-
gistrate or Judge, he may be oblig’d to punish his
own Children where the publick Good and the
Authority of the Laws requires it, even tho’ they
shou’d repent; and not to do so wou’d in such Cases
be a partial Fondness: now God is to be consider’d
not only as the Father but as the Judge and righte-
ous Governor of the World and of Mankind, and
may therefore see it necessary, for the Preservation of
the publick Order, and in Vindication of the Laws
and of his own Authority, to punish his offending
Creatures.

Mr.

Mr. *Locke* concludes, “ this Way of Reconciliation, this Hope of Atonement, the Light of Nature reveal’d to them.” But ’tis certain that the Heathens generally had a Notion that something farther than mere Repentance was necessary to propitiate an offended Deity. Hence the many ways of Atonement used amongst them; and the human Sacrifices that obtain’d almost universally amongst all Nations. Our Author will ascribe this to Superstition, but it has its Foundation in the natural Dread of divine Justice, and in the natural Fears and Jealousies of a guilty Mind, which is apt to turn it self every way without finding Satisfaction in any. And their Philosophers had many of them no other way to quiet those Fears, but by saying the Gods were never angry with any; destroying the Notions of divine Justice, as if God were not displeas’d with Sin, nor wou’d punish any for committing it; a Notion which our Author sometimes seems to advance, but which (as I shall shew afterwards) subverts the Foundations even of natural Religion.

After having produc’d these Passages from Mr. *Locke* and Mr. *Nye*, this Gentleman declaims after his Manner, that “ nothing can be more shocking
“ than to suppose that God was not at all times equally willing to pardon repenting Sinners, and
“ equally willing that they shou’d have the Satisfaction of knowing it; or to suppose that he left
“ all Mankind for so many Ages, and the greatest part even at present in a most miserable State of
“ Doubt and Uncertainty about the Pardon of Sin,
“ and consequently about the Possibility of any Man’s
“ being sav’d; and that the best and wisest Men
“ were absolutely ignorant of what was of the highest
“ Importance for Men to know, p.392, 393*.”

It is not denied that they might have some Hopes
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* P. 355.

of Pardon upon Repentance, tho' mix'd with many Fears and Jealousies; and if they fell (as this Author sometimes owns they did, see p. 379 *.) from the *true primitive Religion*, then tho' God had never seen it fit to give them any absolute Certainty in this matter, they cou'd not justly have complain'd of him, for leaving them under that Uncertainty, and under those Fears that were the natural Effects of their own Guilt. But all those that hold that God made a Promise of a Saviour immediately after the Fall to the common Head and Parent of Mankind, do also maintain that he made gracious Discoveries of his Mercy to penitent Sinners from the Beginning. To keep alive a Sense of his pardoning Mercy, as well as of his Justice, upon the Minds of Men, was the Design of instituting Sacrifices, which were offer'd to God from the Beginning, and were universally spread throughout all Nations, for which there is no Reason so probably to be assign'd as a Tradition deriv'd from the Fountains of the human Race. If Men afterwards lost or corrupted this Promise, and sunk into a State of universal Corruption and Degeneracy, if they forsook the living and true God, and turn'd to base Idols; I don't know how this Gentleman will prove that it was inconsistent with the Divine Wisdom and Goodness to leave them in that State of Uncertainty into which they had brought themselves. And if in that time that seem'd most fit to his infinite Wisdom, it pleas'd him again to give an express Revelation, containing the fullest Discoveries of his rich Grace and Mercy, this was infinite Goodness, and to be acknowledg'd and receiv'd with the highest Thankfulness. But to inquire why he did not do this sooner, or did it not equally to all Mankind, is to divert to another Question, *viz.* that if giving a Revelation be a remarkable Instance of the Divine Goodness, he is oblig'd to

* P. 343.

to give it equally to all and at all Times; which will come properly to be consider'd, when we answer the Author's Objection against Revelation, drawn from its not being universal.

But to pass this by at present: I shall take some Notice of what he advances afterwards, p. 417, 418 *. because it relates to the present Subject. "Can any thing (says he) be more evident, than that if doing evil be the only Foundation of God's Displeasure, ceasing to do evil and doing the contrary must take away that Displeasure?" But the Consequence is by no means evident. By *Displeasure* we are here to understand God's Will to punish; and though a Person shou'd afterwards cease to do evil, the *Displeasure* may still remain for the evil he hath already done. And I have shewn that there may be just and wise Reasons for punishing the evil a Man hath done, even though he repents of having done it. If *doing evil* be the just *Foundation of God's Displeasure*, and what he most disapproves, then it may justly be concluded, that in making his Laws, and annexing Sanctions to those Laws and executing them, he will take that Method which is most effectual to prevent the *doing evil*, and deter his reasonable Creatures from committing it; and whether the pardoning all Sins at all times barely and immediately upon Repentance, without any other Provision for declaring his Justice, and vindicating the Authority of his Laws and Government, wou'd be a proper Method to answer this End, and restrain the doing evil, hath been already consider'd.

But he adds, "As long as Men continue in their Sins, they must continue the proper Objects of God's Resentment; but when they forsaking their Sins act a part suitable to their rational Nature, they of course become the proper Objects of his

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“ Approbation.” I deny that this necessarily follows. For I ask, in such a Case wou’d it be just in God to punish Persons for their past Sins or not? If not, I ask, did those Sins in their own nature deserve punishment or not? If not, God cou’d not justly punish those Sins, even though the Sinners had persisted in them, which is contrary to the present Supposition. If they did in their own nature deserve punishment, and if the Law was just that threaten’d punishment to those Sins, then it is not unjust to inflict that punishment which the Law threaten’d, and which those Sins deserv’d; and consequently it does not follow, that upon Men’s forsaking those Sins, they immediately and of course so far become the Objects of the Divine Approbation, as to be freed from the Punishment they had incurr’d by their past Crimes. The Author here seems to argue upon this Supposition, that it is not just to punish Persons for any Crimes, any longer than they continue to commit those Crimes; that when once they have ceas’d to do so, all the Obligation to punishment, and the Guilt they had contracted by those Crimes, ceases of course, and it is unjust to inflict the punishment those Crimes had deserv’d. But this is to subvert all Government at once, and the Authority of the Laws. Properly speaking all Punishment is for Crimes already committed, in consequence of which the Law has a Demand upon them, and their forsaking their Crimes afterwards does not vacate that Debt of Punishment which they had contracted. Indeed if this Argument be good for any thing, it wou’d prove, that God is absolutely oblig’d even in Justice to pardon Sinners upon their Repentance, and that he cannot in Justice refuse to do so. But this seems to me to imply a Contradiction. For the very Notion of Pardon signifies the Remission of that Penalty that is justly due; it supposes that the Persons pardon’d had

had deserv'd or incurr'd the Penalty, but that the Penalty is graciously remitted. And if it supposes they had deserv'd the Penalty, or that their Crimes render'd them obnoxious to punishment, it also supposes that in strict Justice that punishment might be inflicted; and otherwise there wou'd be no such thing as Forgiveness, or the Exercise of Mercy in forgiving. It must therefore be own'd, that God is not oblig'd in Justice, antecedently to his own Promise, to pardon Sinners even upon their Repentance; and that if he refus'd to pardon them, or remit the Penalty they had incurr'd, he wou'd not do an unjust thing. To say the contrary, wou'd be to put the Pardon of penitent Sinners not upon God's Goodness and Mercy, but upon his Justice. At this rate we shou'd not say as Mr. Nye does in the Passage above produc'd by this Author, and as all do that talk on this Subject, that *if God be a merciful and benign Being*, but if he be a *just Being*, he will forgive the Transgressions of his offending Creatures upon their Repentance; so that we need not implore the Pardon of Sins as a Favour, but may demand it as a Right which he cannot in Justice withhold from us: which is to say, either that there is no Law of God at all, that is, that God is not the Governor of the World; or that there is no Evil, no Crime in transgressing that Law; or that though there be a Crime in transgressing that Law, and though it deserves punishment, and the Law denounces punishment against it, yet God has no Right to inflict that punishment which the Crime deserves, and which the Law justly denounces against that Crime; that is, that it is unjust in God to do that which by the Supposition is allow'd to be just. But this is contrary to Reason, and the common Sense of all Mankind, who have always thought it a proper Language for Penitents before God to acknowledge, that they have by their Sins deserv'd punishment, and that it
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wou'd be just in him to punish them accordingly. But if God is not oblig'd in Justice, antecedently to his own Promise, to pardon Sinners barely and immediately upon their Repentance; then it is plain that if he does pardon them at all, it must be by an Act of free undeserved Mercy; concerning the Measures and Extent of which, and in what Methods and upon what Terms it shall be exercised, we are not of our selves very fit to determine.

Before I leave this Subject, I shall produce some Passages from this Author himself, by which it will appear that even on his own Principles we cannot, if left to our selves, attain to a Certainty how far and upon what Terms God will pardon Sinners. He tells us, p. 41 *. that " though Justice and Mercy
 " are eternally inherent in the Divine Nature, yet
 " these oblige not God either to punish or pardon
 " any farther than his infinite Wisdom sees fit; and
 " such punishing and pardoning are transient Acts,
 " the Effects of his Will, not Properties belong-
 " ing to his Nature." Now if his Mercy obliges him not to pardon Sinners any farther than his infinite Wisdom sees fit, then we can be no further sure that he will pardon Sinners, than we are sure that it seems proper to his Wisdom to do so. And can we pretend of our selves to pass a certain Judgment on what depends on God's most wise Counsels, and on the Determinations of his infinite Wisdom? In many Cases private Persons are very incompetent Judges of what it is proper for wise Governors to do in human Governments, and of what the Reason of State and the publick Good requires; and much more unfit are we, thro' the Narrowness of our Views, to pretend to pass a certain Judgment on the Measures of infinite Wisdom, and what God may see fit and proper in the Government of the World. If pardoning be an Effect of his
 Will,

* P. 35.

Will, an exprefs Revelation of his Will in this Cafe to assure us how far and upon what Terms he will pardon, must be own'd to be a great Advantage.

Again he saith, p. 41 *. “ When the Magistrate
“ punishes a Criminal 'tis an Act of Justice to the
“ Publick, and when he pardons him 'tis an Act of
“ Mercy to the Criminal, tho' an Act of Injustice
“ to the Publick.” It may therefore very well
happen, that that which we think to be agreeable to
our own particular Good, may appear to infinite
Wisdom, that takes in a full View of the whole, to be
contrary to the general Good : in which Case that
which we regard as an Act of Mercy to the parti-
cular Person that offends, may be an Act of Injustice
to the Publick. How do we know therefore, if
left merely to what our own Reason dictates, but
that, however hard it may seem to us, partial as we
are in our own Cause, yet the general Good may require,
in many Cases at least, that Sins shou'd be awfully pu-
nish'd, notwithstanding the Repentance of the Sinner,
as it unquestionably often is in human Governments?

Again he observes, p. 115 †. that “ the natural
“ Law not only commands that Evil-doers shou'd
“ be punish'd, but that Men, according to the
“ different Circumstances they are under, shou'd
“ take the most proper Methods for doing it, and
“ vary as Exigencies require.” It is not therefore, ac-
cording to our Author, a mere arbitrary Thing, whe-
ther Evil-doers shou'd be punish'd. It is what the na-
tural Law commands or requires. From whence I
think it follows, that it is proper that God, as the
righteous Governour of the World, should punish
Evil-doers : and it must be left to his infinite Wi-
sdom and Justice to appoint the Measure and Man-
ner of this Punishment, how far it is to extend,
when, and in what Cases to be mitigated or remitted.
These are Things we cannot of ourselves pretend
certainly to determine any further than he is pleas'd

to

to reveal his Will to this purpose; and if he does so, it will be of no great Use to free us from the Doubts and Uncertainties we must otherwise be under.

Again, the Author takes some pains to shew that even all private Injuries done by one Man to another are not to be forgiven; he says, “ the Doctrine of
 “ forgiving Injuries, except interpreted consistently
 “ with what the Light of Nature dictates to be our
 “ Duty, in preserving our Reputation, Liberty,
 “ and Property, and in doing all we can to hinder all
 “ Injury and Injustice from others as well as ourselves,
 “ wou’d be a Doctrine attended with fatal Consequences,
 “ so that the Expediency or even Lawfulness of forgiving Injuries depends on such Circumstances as human Discretion is to judge of,
 “ p. 340 *.” Here he plainly supposes that in some Circumstances it is not only inexpedient but unlawful to forgive private Injuries; that human Discretion is to judge when, and in what Cases, and how far it is proper to forgive Injuries; and that in this we are to have a Regard to others as well as ourselves, and to what is for the publick Good. And must not God then be allow’d to be the only proper Judge how far and in what Circumstances to forgive the Offences committed against him? And if so, how can we pretend certainly to know, how far and in what Cases, and upon what Terms he will do it, except he is pleas’d to reveal his Will in this Matter? The Author adds, p. 341 †. that “ the Precept of forgiving Injuries, though
 “ it forbids me to punish for Punishment’s sake,
 “ does not bar me of a legal Remedy; and that
 “ all good Governments oblige People, for the
 “ sake of the common Good, to prosecute those
 “ who have injur’d them by robbing, stealing, or
 “ any other ways cheating or defrauding them.”
 Now

* P. 308. † P. 309.

Now I urge, that since he supposes that all good Governments oblige Persons in many Cases to prosecute those who have injur'd them, and that, as is often the Case, notwithstanding their Repentance; then he must grant that in many Cases the publick Good requires that Injuries shou'd be punish'd notwithstanding the Repentance of the Criminal. Why may it not then be suppos'd that, in many Cases the publick Good of the Universe, for the more effectual deterring Persons from Sin, and maintaining the Authority of God and the Majesty of his Government and Laws, requires that Sinners, at least those guilty of Sins of a more heinous kind, and long and obstinately persisted in, shou'd be severely punish'd, notwithstanding the Repentance of the Sinner? And as it wou'd not be a Virtue but a Fault in a Magistrate to give way to the Movements of Pity, in a Case where the great Ends of Government and the publick Good require him to punish, so it wou'd be far from being a Perfection in the Deity, if his Compassion to any Creature sway'd him to a Proceedure, that in the whole is not for the Good, the Order and Welfare of the moral World. So that after all, we are no further sure, by the Light of Nature, of God's forgiving any particular Offences upon Repentance, than we are sure that it is for the publick Good, and for the Order and Welfare of the whole, that those Offences thus circumstanc'd shou'd be forgiven.

Thus, *e. g.* let us suppose a Man to have lived for many Years in a Course of gross presumptuous Sins, contrary to the Dictates of his own Conscience; let us suppose also that he is at length truly penitent, brought to a deep Sense and Horror of his Crimes, and a hearty Sorrow for them; but he is full of anxious Thoughts whether God will forgive him. What Certainty can be given him of Pardon from the mere Light of Nature? Tell him that God is
merciful,

merciful, and will forgive his Sins upon Repentance. He may justly reply, How know I but a just and holy God, the wise and righteous Governor of the World, may see it necessary, notwithstanding my Repentance, to make me an Example of his just Vengeance, that others may see and fear, and not dare to do so wickedly? Or though he may think proper to forgive some slighter Offences, yet what Assurance have I that he will forgive such heinous presumptuous Sins, so long persisted in against the Dictates of Conscience (which he has plac'd as a Monitor and a Judge within me) as I have been guilty of? Or if he will in some measure remit the Rigor of the Penalty upon my Repentance, yet how do I know how far he will remit it, and what Punishment (though less than the Demerit of my Crimes) he will still think fit to lay upon me? Here my Soul is toss'd about with endless Uncertainties. I find some Hope when I consider the divine Mercy, but I am cast down again when I consider the Justice and Righteousness of God as the great Ruler of the World, the Greatness of his Majesty, the Heinousness and Aggravations of my Crimes, and the Authority of his Laws. I know he is merciful, but his Mercy is always exercis'd in a Consistency with his Justice and Wisdom, and the great Ends of his Government; and how know I then but his infinite Wisdom and Righteousness may see it fit to punish such Sinners as I am, and make them Monuments and Examples to all the World, to shew forth the Authority of his Laws, and preserve in the Minds of his Creatures a just Dread of offending him? May not many Cases happen (and how know I but mine is such a Case?) in which it is not fit that Repentance it self shou'd avert the Punishment, because the publick Good requires, that those who thus sin shou'd be exemplarily punish'd?

I know not what the Author cou'd say to satisfy
such

such a Person, and to remove his Fears, except it were to tell him, that he needs not be afraid, he has done God no injury, there is no such thing properly as sinning against God at all; which is the Scheme he advances in his fourth Chapter. But as these Things are not only false in themselves, as I shall afterwards shew, but contrary to Men's natural Notions, I believe they cou'd give but small Satisfaction to a guilty awaken'd Conscience.

But if God hath given an express Revelation, in which he hath plainly declar'd the Methods in which he will be reconcil'd to his offending Creatures; if it appears that he hath himself made a most wise Provision for manifesting his Mercy to penitent Sinners, in such a way as secures the Honour of his Justice, and the Authority of his Laws; if he hath accordingly, in that Revelation, expressly engag'd himself by Promise to pardon even the greatest of Sinners, when they return to him by a sincere Repentance, and to crown even their imperfect if sincere Obedience with a glorious eternal Reward; this must needs be an unspeakable Satisfaction to Creatures conscious to themselves of many Sins and Defects, and every way sufficient to remove the Fears and Jealousies of the truly penitent. And it must be a further Satisfaction to them to be assur'd, that if they apply themselves with Sincerity to their Duty, God will grant them those divine Influences and Aids, which may be of infinite Use to assist and support them amidst the manifold Temptations to which they are expos'd. To be assur'd of all these Things by an express Declaration of the Divine Will, cannot but highly tend to our Comfort, and to our Encouragement in the Ways of Virtue.

The Sum of what has been said with respect to the Clearness of the Law of Nature is this. It has been shewn, that whatever human Reason may be suppos'd, absolutely speaking, to be capable of, if carried to the

utmost possible Improvement, yet taking Mankind as they are, if left to themselves, they wou'd be greatly at a loss in many Things which it is of Importance to them to know ; that even with respect to those Principles and Duties of the Law of Nature, that seem capable of the clearest Proof, yet Men have been under great Darknefs and Uncertainty, where they have been left to their own unassisted Reason ; nor can it be ordinarily expected that the bulk of Mankind (whatever we suppose their natural Capacities to be) shou'd come to a distinct, a clear and certain Knowledge of them, if left to collect them each Man for himself, by the mere Force of his own Reason ; that therefore an external Revelation from God, laying these Principles and Duties clearly before them, wou'd be of great Use, to give them a more clear and certain and easy Knowledge of them than otherwise they wou'd have. That besides those Principles and Obligations of the Law of Nature, which seem to be absolutely and in themselves capable of clear Proof to right Reason, there are other Things concerning which the Reason of Man, if left to itself, cou'd not pretend to form a clear and certain Judgment, as being Things that depend, in a great measure, on the divine Counsels, and the free Determinations of infinite Wisdom ; such are the Methods God will take with his offending Creatures that have transgress'd his Law ; whether and how far and upon what Terms he will pardon their Iniquities ; whether he will reward even their imperfect Obedience, and what kind of Reward he will confer. These Things are of great Importance to us to know, and yet the Light of Nature alone cannot give us a certain Information about them. It were therefore greatly to be wish'd that God wou'd give us an express Revelation of his Will on these Heads ; and if he has done so, we ought to accept

accept it with great Thankfulness, and with a deep Sense of our Obligations to divine Goodness.

And now I think the two main Pillars of the Author's Scheme, the one concerning the absolute Perfection of the original Law of Nature, which he supposes to be incapable of any Additions; the other concerning the Clearness of it to all Mankind, which he supposes to be so well known to all Men by the Light of Nature, or the mere Force of their own Reason, that it cou'd not possibly be made clearer by any external Revelation, have been shewn to be very weak and without any solid Foundation; and consequently the Arguments drawn from thence, to shew that no external Revelation can either instruct us in any thing that did not belong to that original Law, or can make this Law clearer to us than it is to all Men without it, and is therefore perfectly needless and useless, fall to the ground. This might suffice to shew the Weakness and Insufficiency of the Author's Scheme. But that we may have a better Notion of his Views, and the true Design and Tendency of that glorious Scheme he wou'd introduce, I shall now proceed to consider the Account he himself gives of the main Principles of that Law of Nature which he supposes to be so clear, and at the same time of such great Advantage to Mankind.





C H A P. VII.

That the Author's Scheme of Natural Religion is very defective; and that he gives a wrong Account of some of the main Principles and Duties of the Law of Nature.

THE Author of Christianity as old as the Creation, on all Occasions professes his high Esteem of the Law of Nature. This is the Rule by which he is for governing his own Actions, and which he recommends to others as the best Rule for governing theirs. It is therefore to be suppos'd, that he both has the Interests of this Law nearly at heart, and that he himself has a thorough Knowledge of it. He represents it to be that Religion which it is the Will of God all Men shou'd *know, believe, profess* and *practise*: he ought therefore to be so just and kind as to let the World know what it is which is of so great importance to them to believe, profess and practise. He frequently indeed asserts it to be so clear to all Mankind, that they need no Information about it; but he does wrong to measure all Men's Understandings by his own; that may not perhaps be clear to others which seems perfectly clear to him; and it is certain, from the general Strain of his Book, that he supposes almost all Mankind to have fallen from the original uncorrupted Religion of Nature, which therefore, in his great Charity, he endeavours to restore and represent in its primitive Purity and Simplicity, stript of those corrupt Additions and impure Mixtures which the Folly and Superstition of Men have introduc'd.

But if it shou'd appear that after all his Boasts of the Clearness of the Law of Nature, he himself gives

a wrong Account of some of the main Duties of that Law; and that notwithstanding his high Pretences of a Regard and Veneration for it, he advances Principles which by evident Consequence subvert that Law; I believe it will be own'd that in such a Case he is far from deserving the Praises he expects from others, and which he very liberally bestows upon himself.

And yet I am persuaded, upon the most impartial Consideration of his Book, that this is really the Case, and am apt to think that the wrong Notions he entertains of the Law of Nature form some of his chief Prejudices against the Christian Revelation.

The main Principle he lays down as the Foundation of his whole Scheme of natural Religion is this, that “ as it is evident from the Light of Nature that there is a God, or in other Words, a “ Being absolutely perfect and infinitely happy in “ himself; so it is equally demonstrable that the “ Creatures can neither add to or take from the “ Happiness of that Being; and that he cou'd have “ no Motive in framing his Creatures, or in giving Laws to such of them as are capable of knowing his Will, but their own Good, p. 14*.” Or as he expresses it, p. 20. that “ it is impossible for “ God in governing the World to have any other “ thing in view than the Good of the Govern'd. “ Nor can he require any thing of us but what “ makes for our Happiness, nor forbid any thing “ but what tends to our Hurt, p. 15†.” For clearing the Design of this Passage, and others to the same purpose, it must be observ'd, that he supposes that “ there are certain things which *naturally* and “ *necessarily* conduce to the Good or Hurt of Mankind, and that these are the only things God can “ require or forbid, p. 359‖.” And that consequently God cannot require any thing of Men, except that

M 3

particular

* P. 11, 12.

† P. 12.

‖ P. 324, 325.

particular thing *necessarily* tends in the Nature of things to their Good, nor can forbid any thing, except that particular thing tends *naturally* and *necessarily* to their Hurt. For this is his plain Meaning, and on this Foundation it is that he argues against positive Precepts. Accordingly he expressly declares, that “ God can require nothing of Men, but what they for their own Interest, though there were no positive Divine Commands, were oblig’d to do, p. 359.”

It is in pursuance of this Scheme of Principles, that he seems frequently to resolve all Man’s Obedience purely into a Regard to his own Interest; that this is the Measure of his Duty; and that his own Advantage is to be the ultimate End he is to have in view. To this purpose he observes, that “ as the Desire of Happiness is the only innate Principle in Mankind, p. 22, 363*. so the Spring of all the Creatures Actions is their own Good, and he intimates that it is for this Reason only, that they are to love God himself, p. 16.” That “ no Man can be oblig’d to do any thing that does not some way or other contribute to his Happiness, (yea, except he knows that that particular thing has a *natural* Tendency to procure his Happiness, for this seems to be his Meaning, since he immediately adds,) that consequently according to the Sense Men have of their own Happiness, and of the Means which will *naturally* procure it, they will assuredly attain the Knowledge of their respective Duties, p. 23.” Accordingly he declares, and it is the Subject and Title of his ninth Chapter, that “ human Happiness is the ultimate End and Design of all traditional as well as original Revelation.” Though this is very odd, when he believes and it is the Design of his Book to shew, that there is really no such thing as a true traditional Divine Revelation, distinct from what he calls the original and natural One,

* P. 329.

One, and that all professed traditional Revelation is contrary to human Happiness, and has the worst Influence upon it.

It is upon this Supposition of our Duty being to be measur'd by our Interest, that he founds his great Rule concerning the Morality of Actions, which he places wholly in their Tendency to our own Benefit in the Circumstances we are in. He saith, that "it is the Tendency of Actions which makes them either good or bad; they that tend to promote human Happiness are always good, and those that have a contrary Tendency are always bad; and 'tis the Circumstances Men are under by which we are to judge of the Tendency of Actions." This is the Rule which he so highly extols, as holding in all Cases without exception, p. 345, 349, 350*. Accordingly he maintains that it is this must direct us when we are to speak Truth. The Expediency of Truth or Falshood must be judg'd of wholly by its Tendency to our Benefit in the Circumstances we are in, p. 347.

But tho' he seems frequently to resolve the whole of our Duty into a Regard to our own private Interest, yet at other times he places the whole of Religion in doing good to others. He tells us, that "Religion as well as Government was *wholly* ordain'd for Men's mutual Defence, p. 20." And he defines "Religion to consist in a constant Disposition of Mind to do all the Good we can, and thereby render our selves acceptable to God in answering the End of his Creation, p. 21†." From God's being self-sufficient, and having no Motive to create things, but only that he might communicate to them his Goodness and Happiness, he infers, that "if so, then they who do all the Good they can to themselves and their Fellow-Creatures, answer the End of their Creation,

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" p.

* P. 312, &c. † P. 18.

“ p. 355*.” This he repeats, p. 188. and often elsewhere. He asserts, that “ as Man is by Nature qualified to answer all the Purposes of a social Life, and to act a part agreeable to Reason, so in doing this he gives Glory to his Maker by fulfilling the End of his Creation, p. 72.” He frequently represents Religion as consisting wholly in imitating God; and this Imitation of him he makes to consist wholly in doing good to Mankind; and therefore that “ all rational Creatures, who to their utmost imitate their great Creator and Benefactor, in communicating Happiness to each other, do all that God requires of them, p. 279 †.” And that “ the only way we have to shew our real Gratitude to our great Creator and Benefactor, is to be as useful as we can to his Creatures, whom we ought to love as our selves, p. 72, 73.”

Having represented this Author's Scheme, as far as it relates to the main Principles of the Law of Nature, let us now, that we may have a full View of his Design, see what he offers concerning the Sanctions of that Law. From his great Principle that God is infinitely happy in himself, and therefore can have no other End in view but the Good of his Creatures, he infers, and it is the Subject of his fourth Chapter, that “ not only the Matter of all God's Laws, but the Penalties annex'd to them are for the Good of Mankind, even of those who suffer for the Breach of them.” In pursuance of this Design, he affirms, “ that as it was for the sake of Man that he gave him Laws, so he executes them purely for the same Reason; since, upon his own account, he can't in the least be affected, whether his Laws be or be not observ'd, p. 38 ||. and cannot strictly speaking be made angry, provok'd or griev'd by the Conduct of us wretched Mortals, nor can gain any Comfort or Satisfaction from the Thoughts

“ Thoughts and Actions of his Creatures, p. 39.
“ that is, from their observing his Laws, as he ex-
“ presses it, p. 38.” Accordingly it seems to me to be
his Design to insinuate that there is no such thing pro-
perly as sinning against God at all; nor are Sins ever
to be regarded as Offences committed against God,
but only as Injuries done by one Creature to another;
for he tells us, “ no Man breaks the divine Laws
“ out of Contempt to his Maker, nor imagines he
“ can do God an Injury; and as he can never be
“ injur’d, so he can never want Reparation, p. 38.
“ and that consequently in punishing no more than
“ rewarding does God act a Party, much less an in-
“ jur’d Party, who wants Satisfaction or Repara-
“ tion of Honour, *ibid.*” and therefore he will not
allow that “ God in punishing those who violate
“ his Law, acts from a Regard to his own Honour,
“ and the Dignity of his Laws and Government,
“ or that he ever punishes them as for an Injury done
“ to himself, distinct from the Harm that accrues
“ by the Breach of them to his Creatures, p. 37,
“ 38.” He affirms, that “ in doing Acts of Justice,
“ God acts purely for the Good of his Creatures;
“ and the Effects of his Justice must not only be for
“ the Good of others, but even of the Persons pu-
“ nish’d; and since God can never hate any thing
“ he hath made, whatever punishment he inflicts
“ must be a Mark of his Love,” (*viz.* to that par-
ticular Person that is punish’d, p. 41, 42*.) and on
these Principles he argues against the Eternity of
Hell Torments, *ibid.* Finally, he seems to deny any
Rewards or Punishments at all, but what naturally
and necessarily flow from the Nature of the Actions
themselves which Men do, p. 25, 26. The Passa-
ges I shall produce afterwards.

Thus I have endeavour’d in one View to lay be-
fore the Reader the Author’s Scheme of Principles
relating

* P. 36.

relating to natural Religion, that we may the better see what kind of Religion it is that he wou'd introduce instead of the Christian Revelation.

It must be own'd that he speaks in exalted Terms of God, of his infinite Perfection and Self-sufficiency; the Principle upon which he builds his whole Scheme, seems to be a glorious one, and makes a very fair Appearance, *viz.* That God is infinitely happy in himself, and that the Creatures can neither add to nor take from his Happiness. But then we are to be very careful what Consequences we draw from this Principle. The *Epicureans*, who this Author tells us, p. 56 *. *had exalted Notions of their Gods*, from this very Principle, that the divine Nature is perfectly happy in it self, not to be benefited by our Services, nor hurt by our Misdeeds, drew Consequences, that tended to the utter Destruction of all Religion and Virtue; *viz.* that therefore God does not concern himself with Man or his Affairs, either to reward the virtuous or to punish the wicked.

To represent God as all Goodness, having nothing in view but the Happiness of his Creatures, seems a plausible Scheme; but if a Man shou'd represent God as so intirely designing the Good of his Creatures, yea and of every particular Creature, that he cannot punish any of them for their Misdeeds, so that they need not be afraid of any evil from him; this under pretence of magnifying the divine Goodness, wou'd be to banish the Fear of God out of the World, to betray the Cause of Virtue, and to give a full Encouragement to all Vice and Wickedness, by taking away those Terrors of divine Justice which are the most effectual Restraints to Evil-doers.

For any Man to say that God does nothing for his own sake, and that he requires nothing of Man, no-Part of Religion for his own sake but for our's, looks plausible, and seems to argue exalted Thoughts
of

of the Supreme Being and of his disinterested Goodness; but if under this pretence he shou'd insinuate that God in giving Laws or executing them, does not act at all from a Regard to his own Dignity and Authority, and to what is becoming his own infinite Majesty; that no Part of Religion terminates directly and immediately on God; that he requires of his Creatures no Duties or Worship, of which he is the proper and immediate Object, as distinct from their doing good to one another: this Man wou'd, under pretence of high Thoughts of God, and of subverting Superstition, banish Religion out of the World, and subvert a fundamental Part of the Law of Nature, which in the first place prescribes the Duties we more immediately owe to the Author of our Beings.

To say no Man can injure or hurt God is very true, but if under this pretence any Man shou'd endeavour to lessen the Malignity of Sin, and insinuate that all the Evil of it consists in the Harm it does to our selves or to our Fellow-Creatures, and that it shall not be regarded or punish'd at all as an Offence against the Majesty and Authority of the great Ruler of the World: This wou'd in my Opinion have a very ill Influence, as it wou'd tend to diminish the Horror of Sin, and to make People easy in their Crimes.

To speak of the inward Satisfaction that attends Virtue, and the Horrors and Agonies that accompany and follow a vicious Course in the very Nature of the thing, seems to argue just Thoughts of the Beauty and Excellency of the one, and of the Odiousness and Deformity of the other; but if a Man shou'd under this pretence deny any Rewards or Punishments but what necessarily flow from the very Nature of Virtue and Vice, he wou'd deprive the one of some of its strongest Supports, and wou'd take away those Restraints that are most effectual to deter Men from the other. I

I own I look upon the Principles of this Author in this View, and as having this Tendency. If I mistake him it is not willingly, but after the most mature and impartial Consideration I am capable of. And therefore I can't help thinking, that after all his glorious Pretences to Virtue and Morality, he really subverts it, and that his Scheme has not a much more friendly Aspect on natural Religion taken in its just Extent, than it has on reveal'd.

But this will more plainly appear from a more particular Examination of his Scheme, to which I shall now proceed.

I shall begin with considering his great Principle, That God is infinitely happy in himself, and that the Creatures can neither add to nor take from his Happiness. A Principle undoubtedly true. For God's Happiness consists in the infinite and absolute Perfection of his Nature, and the Complacency necessarily and eternally arising from it. And as his own Perfection, and the Complacency or Delight arising from it, is always alike infinite, that is, incapable of Addition or Diminution; so it must be granted, that it can never be his End in giving Being to his Creatures, or in giving them Laws, to add to his own essential Happiness, that is, to add to his own Perfection, or to the Complacency arising from it; or in other Words, to make himself more perfect and happy and glorious than he always necessarily is; for this is impossible. But though it can't be said, that in making Creatures or giving them Laws he design'd to add to his own Happiness or essential Perfection, yet we must say that in making the World, and in all his Dealings with his Creatures, he design'd (and it is impossible for him to do otherwise) to act agreeably to his own infinite Perfection, which is an eternal and indispensable Law to him, and that his acting thus yields him Complacency. And it is thus the Author himself represents

represents it, Chap. 3. the Title of which runs thus, that " the Perfection and Happiness of all rational Beings, Supreme as well as Subordinate, consists in living up to the Dictates of their Nature." And afterwards he explains himself thus, that " that which renders God so infinitely happy in himself, is the exact Agreement of all his Actions with the all-comprehending Reason of his own Mind, p. 23." And again, that " the Perfection, and consequently the Happiness of God, consists in the Purity and Rectitude of his Nature, *ibid.*"

Though therefore the communicative Goodness of God's own most perfect Nature, was the immediate Motive and Principle in his creating the World, and the various Orders of Beings in it; yet this Goodness must be always consider'd as under the Direction of infinite Wisdom and Rectitude; and this Wisdom and Rectitude of the Divine Nature carries him always to do that which is most just and right, and all things consider'd fittest to be done, and most agreeable to the Order of things.

When therefore we are inquiring what God can or cannot do, or what is the Rule and Measure of his Dealings with his Creatures, we are not to consider mere Goodness or Beneficence alone, but Goodness as under the Direction of infinite Wisdom and Righteousness. Indeed mere Goodness or Bounty alone is far from constituting a perfect Character; for who wou'd have a great Esteem for a blind necessary Goodness acting without Discernment to the utmost of its Capacity? And therefore this is far from being an adequate Notion of the Deity. And it is evident in fact, that it is not mere infinite Goodness or Bounty, acting necessarily to the utmost of its Capacity, that is exercis'd either in creating or in governing the World, and the several Orders of Beings in it (for then all Creatures must have

have been made necessarily and unavoidably happy, and that equally at all Times to the utmost possible Degree, which is contrary to plain Fact) but Goodness as directed in all its Effects by infinite Wisdom. It must be further consider'd, that the Goodness of the Supreme Being is to be regarded as having a Respect to the Good of the Whole; and the Good of the Whole must take in whatever tends to the Beauty, Order, and Harmony of the universal System, and therefore he can design the Good and Happiness of particular Beings, no further than is consistent with and subservient to the general Good and Order of the whole moral World.

And now let us consider the Use our Author makes of this great Principle, that God is infinitely happy in himself; it is this, that *it is impossible for him, either in giving Laws or in executing those Laws, to have any other thing in view than the Good of the Govern'd*, and by this he seems to understand not merely the general Good of his Creatures, but the Good of each particular Creature; he represents this as precisely the single Point the Supreme Being has or can possibly have in view. Upon this Foundation his whole Scheme proceeds; that therefore God can require nothing of any Creature, but what in the Nature of things tends to that Creature's own particular Benefit, and can inflict no Punishment but what is for the Benefit even of that particular Person that is punish'd. And he tells us, p. 408 *. that " God will either here or hereafter bestow on the rational Creation all the Happiness their Nature is capable of, since that was the End why God gave it them." Where, as far as I can understand him, he seems to intimate, that God must make all rational Creatures, not only all Orders of Beings, but every Individual in each Order or Species of Beings, as happy as they are capable of
either

either in this World or in the next; and that this was the End why God gave them their Nature. But I ask, must not the Consideration of their moral Character and Conduct be taken in, (since it is of reasonable Creatures, moral Agents that we are speaking) in order to shew whether and how far it is consistent with the Divine Wisdom and Purity to bestow Happiness upon them? When this Gentleman here supposes, that God gave them Natures capable of Happiness, and that his End in giving them those Natures was that they might be happy, must not this be understood thus, that he gave them reasonable moral Powers and Faculties, in the due Use and Improvement of which they shou'd obtain Happiness, and not otherwise? Or is the Meaning of it this, that God will make them all happy whether they do this or not, in whatsoever manner they behave, and however they act? But wou'd not this be to confound the Reasons and Differences of Things, to suppose that God will raise those that have made the worst Use of their Reason and moral Agency, to the same Happiness with those that have made the best? And upon this Scheme of things, I can see no Reason for the Limitation this Author here puts, that God will make them all happy *either here or hereafter*; for if mere infinite Goodness were to be consider'd as acting to the utmost of its Capacity, and God's only End in giving them their Natures was to make them happy at any rate and by any means, it ought to be said, that *both here and hereafter* God will bestow on all the rational Creation all the Happiness their Natures are capable of; and that they must all be immediately rais'd to the highest possible Felicity, and be at all Times perfectly happy; which it is evident from plain Fact and Experience an infinitely wise and good God has not thought fit to do.

But if this Gentleman will explain himself thus, that when he saith, it was God's Design in making
reasonable

reasonable Creatures, and giving them Laws, to bestow upon them the Happiness they are capable of, he only intends to signify, that God designs to make them happy in such a way and upon such terms as becomes moral Agents, and as is consistent with the Freedom of their Natures, and with the Nature and Order of moral Government, (and accordingly he talks of God's dealing with Men hereafter *according to the Use they have made of their moral Agency here*) then God's Wisdom and Righteousness must come in to be consider'd in his Dealings with his reasonable Creatures, as well as his Goodness. It must then be said, that God did not so design the Interest and Happiness of every particular Creature, as to have this singly in View; and that when he made reasonable Beings, moral Agents, and endued them with Understanding, Will, and active Powers, he did not design to make them happy at any rate, but only in such a way as is most suitable to the Order of things, and to his own rectoral Wisdom and Purity.

This Writer himself often tells us, that God *acts in a constant Conformity to the Nature and Reason of things*; and that *it is a Contradiction to his Nature to do any thing that is not fit and reasonable*, p. 26. Now in judging of what is fit and reasonable, not merely the Interest or Benefit of any particular Being or Beings must be consider'd, but what is most becoming God as the most wise and righteous Governor of the World, and what all things consider'd is best upon the whole and fittest to be done. It is therefore an unwarrantable Presumption in this Author to pronounce so positively as he does, that "God can require nothing of Men, but what they " for their own Interest, tho' there were no positive " divine Commands, were oblig'd to do, p. 359 *." I grant that it is reasonable to suppose that God will
always

* P. 325.

always make it the Interest of his Creatures to obey his Laws, by amply rewarding their Obedience; that he can require nothing that is in it self, all Circumstances consider'd, unfit and cruel and unjust; he cannot require a Creature to go on in a Course that will necessarily and eternally make that Creature miserable; but to say he can require nothing but what in it self in that very Instance, and abstractly from any Reward attending it, tends in the Nature of Things to that Creature's Benefit, is to entertain very narrow Notions of the divine Dominion, and to deny God a Power which is easily allow'd to earthly Parents and Masters. The supreme Governor of the World may see it fit for very wise Ends to require a thing that does not immediately and in it self by any natural Consequence or necessary Result of things tend to the Benefit of the Creatures of whom he requires it; yea, he may in particular Instances require a thing that may seem to be a Hardship in it self consider'd, abstracted from the Reward with which he will crown that Obedience; and in that Case, tho' his Goodness is such, that in the final Issue the Reward he will confer shall make an ample Compensation for the temporal Inconveniences they suffer, yet it cou'd not be said that the thing requir'd was in it self and antecedently for their Interest, and what they wou'd have chosen or been oblig'd to do if God had not enjoin'd it. It may be an End worthy of God to exercise the Obedience of his reasonable Creatures in some such Instances, to give them an Opportunity to shew their ready and intire Submission where their own Interest is not immediately concern'd; yea, even where in some particular Cases it may seem to be against their present Interest. Hereby their Subjection to him, and Regard for him, their intire Resignation to the Authority and Wisdom of the supreme universal Lord (which is an excellent Disposition highly becoming reasonable

Creatures) wou'd be more eminently conspicuous, and the Beauty of their disinterested Obedience, wou'd be more remarkably display'd and exercis'd, and yield a glorious Example to the moral World.

The sum is this: Our Author affirms, that because God is happy in himself, he can only have in view the Good of his Creatures; from whence he infers two things, the one is, that God can in no Case require any thing of any Creature, but what tends in that very instance naturally and necessarily to that Creature's Benefit, and therefore cannot give any positive Precepts: The other is, that he cannot lay any punishment upon any Creature but what tends to the Benefit and Happiness of that particular Creature. Now the Principle will not support either of these Inferences. For besides that it must be said, that tho' in making Creatures and in giving them Laws, or in executing those Laws, God cannot have in view the adding any thing to his own essential Happiness and Perfection, yet he must have in view the acting agreeably to his own Perfections; and that consequently not mere Goodness or Beneficence is to be consider'd, but as in conjunction with and under the direction of infinite Wisdom and Righteousness; besides this, I say, when we speak of his having in view the *Good of the Governed*, the only just Sense in which this can be understood is, that he has always in view the Good of the whole; and the Good of the whole necessarily takes in whatever tends to the Beauty, Order, and Harmony of the moral World, to which the Interests of any particular Being or Beings must give way. Now it does not follow from God's having always in view the Good of the whole, or the universal Order of things, that therefore he can require nothing of any Creature, but what naturally and necessarily tends in that very Instance to the Benefit of that particular Creature; for it may be for the Good of the whole, and
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may have a Beauty and Congruity in it, that some Commands be laid upon the Creatures, in which their own private Interest is not directly and immediately concern'd; [though if we speak of positive Precepts, which the Author has particularly in view, it has been shewn that these have a Tendency to our own Benefit, though not absolutely and in themselves consider'd, yet as they are circumstanc'd, and taken in the manner and for the Purposes for which they are appointed by God] nor does it follow, that in inflicting Punishments God must always have in view the particular Benefit of the Person punish'd; for though it may tend to the Hurt and Misery of the particular Being or Beings that are punish'd, yet it may be highly for the Benefit of the whole, and for maintaining the Peace and Order and Harmony of the moral System: as I shall have occasion to shew more largely afterwards.

I now proceed to another Part of the Author's Scheme. The former related to God's Actings towards us, this relates to Man's own Actings; and he seems to resolve all our Obedience wholly into a Regard to our own Happiness and Interest; and that this is to be the only Measure of our Duty, and the ultimate End we are to have in view.

He tells us, that "*the Desire of Happiness is the only innate Principle in Mankind*, p. 22, 363. *"
That "*the Spring of all the Actions of the Creatures is their own Good*, p. 16." And accordingly he plainly asserts, that "*no Man can be oblig'd to do any thing, that does not some way or other contribute to his Happiness*;" yea, except he is convinc'd that that particular thing has a Tendency in its own nature to his Interest; for this seems to be his Meaning, since he immediately adds, that "con-
sequently according to the Sense Men have of
their own Happiness, and of the Means which
will naturally promote it, they will assuredly at-

tain the Knowledge of their respective Duties, “ p. 23*.” Our own Interest then is the single Point we are to have in view, and by this we are in all Cases to judge of our Duty. We must act in all we do, even in those Duties of Religion that are more immediately directed to God, and of which he is the immediate Object, not from a Regard to God, but to our selves. We are either to have no distinct Regard to the Divine Dignity and Glory, or else to consider it only as subordinate to our own Interest. Thus Man is made his own ultimate End, and all his Views must terminate in himself. If we love and honour God, still it must be only or principally for our own sakes. Thus he tells us, that “ the Difference between the Supreme Being “ infinitely happy in himself, and the Creatures “ who are not so, is, that all his Actions, in relation to his Creatures, flow from a pure disinterested Love; whereas the Spring of all the Actions of the Creatures is their own Good; we love God because he first loved us; and consequently our Love to him will be in proportion to our Sense of his Goodness to us, p. 16†.” There is therefore, according to him, no such thing amongst the Creatures as a disinterested Love and Goodness; all flows from a pure Regard to their own Interest. Yet he that says this, has the Confidence to represent himself and his Friends, as alone standing up for a disinterested Virtue; as *govern’d not by servile Motives, but by the original Obligation of the moral Fitness of things, in Conformity to the Nature, and in Imitation of the perfect Will of God; that this is true Deism; and that they who do not act thus, deserve not the Title of true Deists, p. 368 ||.* But how can he say they *act not from servile Motives* (by which he there evidently means, acting not from a View to their own Interest and Advantage)

Advantage) *but in Conformity to the Nature of God*, when in the Passage just now cited he makes a disinterested Love and Goodness peculiar to God, and that the Spring of all the Creatures Actions is their own Good, and all our Love is interested, and purely for our own sakes?

Yet the same Writer, with whom it is a familiar thing to contradict himself, also declares, that
“ as God has implanted in Bodies, in order to pre-
“ serve the natural World, a Tendency to each
“ other, so he has implanted in Minds, the better
“ to support the moral World, a Tendency to be
“ kind and beneficent to one another; and so deep
“ is the Impression of Benevolence, that we can’t
“ but applaud a Person who does brave and gene-
“ rous Actions, though we suffer by ’em; and as
“ much condemn him who acts basely and treache-
“ rously, though we are ever so great Gainers, p.
“ 73*.” Here he makes a disinterested Benevo-
lence towards Mankind, and a disinterested Love
of Virtue to be implanted in us, distinct from the
Principle of Self-love, or the Desire of our own
Happiness, which at other Times he affirms to be
the only innate Principle in Mankind. And why
then shou’d he not also suppose a Love to God for
his own intrinsic Excellency and Beauty, and not
merely for his Goodness to us in particular? Indeed
his Goodness to us, or the Benefits we receive from
him, may be the first Motives and Inducements to
our Love, in which Sense that Passage of Scripture
is to be understood, which he mentions, that *we love
God because he first loved us*. But this is not the only
Reason of our Love, but chiefly his universal Good-
ness and essential Excellency, as he is in himself the
supreme Good, the original Beauty, and therefore
the first Amiable. In loving and esteeming him,
we must not merely consider his Beneficence to us

in particular; but it is his transcendent Excellency and Perfection, his infinite Amiableness in himself, as comprehending whatever is wise and just and perfect and lovely, that renders him the primary and the worthiest Object of the Love and Esteem of all reasonable Beings; as by the Author's own Acknowledgement we cannot but conceive the highest Love and Esteem for an amiable and perfect Character, even abstracting from the Consideration of any private Benefit and Advantage we our selves reap from it.

I can't help thinking that this Part of the Author's Scheme, which teaches us to measure our Duty wholly by our Interest, and makes this the single Point to which we are to direct all our Actions and all our Views, is mean and selfish, and contrary to the just Order of Things. If we compare his Morality in this respect with that of the Gospel, we shall easily see a vast Difference between them. His all tends to Self, and terminates there, low and narrow in its Views, makes the Creature and its own selfish Interests its own ultimate End; but that of the Gospel (tho' it does not oblige us to lay aside all Regard to our selves and our own Interests, yea opens the Way for our obtaining the noblest Happiness our Natures are capable of) carries the Soul beyond it self to God, teacheth us to direct our Thoughts and Views principally and ultimately to him, to subject our Wills and our own narrow Interests to his Will and to his Glory; in a word, to make him our highest End, and to live not to our selves, but unto him *of whom and thro' whom and to whom are all Things*. And this is agreeable to the just Order and Reason of things. For what is more evident than that as God is the chiefest Good, so he is also the highest End, to which the Aims and Views of reasonable Creatures in their several Orders and Degrees should ultimately tend? and in this the Beauty and Harmony of the

the rational Creation does consist, when all tend to God as their common Center, and all have a Reference to him as their common End, who otherwise wou'd be endlessly divided, if they made each of them their own particular Interest their chief End.

This leads me to another Part of our Author's Scheme, where he seems to make the whole of Religion to consist in our doing Good to our Fellow-Creatures. Indeed I don't well see how this can be maintain'd upon his Principles; he ought rather to say that the whole of Religion consists in doing Good to our selves, and in pursuing our own Interests. Accordingly he declares that, " whoever acts
" what is *best for himself* both in a publick and private Capacity, does all that God or Man can
" require, p. 20, 21." and he tells us, in the Passage cited before, " that the only innate Principle
" in Man is the Desire of *his own Happiness*; and
" the Goodness of God requires no more than a
" right cultivating this Principle, p. 363*." he adds indeed, " in preferring a general or publick to a
" particular or private Good, and where there are
" two Evils, and both can't be avoided, to chuse
" the less, *sub Ratione boni*." But if, as this Gentleman affirms, *the only innate Principle in Man is a Desire of his own Happiness*, I can't see what Obligation he is under, according to this Author, to prefer a general or publick to his own particular or private Good. For his own Happiness is what he is to have principally in view; this is still to be his ultimate End, to which every thing else must be subordinate; and in doing this he acts up to the *only innate Principle* or Law by which he is to govern himself. If *the only Spring of the Creatures Actions be their own Good*, and if " according to the
" Sense Men have of their own Happiness, and of
" the Means that naturally tend to promote it, they

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will

* P. 329;

“ will assuredly attain the Knowledge of their respective Duties,” as this Gentleman asserts in the Passages before cited; then supposing the general or publick to come in competition with a Man’s own particular or private Good (which is the Case he puts, or else there wou’d be no need of talking of preferring the one to the other) I don’t see but upon his Principles, it wou’d be his Duty to prefer his own Good to that of the publick; and tho’ he might regard the publick Damage and his own, as both of ’em Evils, yet he ought to regard the former as the lesser Evil, and therefore to chuse it, *sub Ratione boni*. He ought, if the Maxims advanced by this Gentleman be true, in no Case to deny his own private Interest for the Good of others, or to sacrifice his own Life or Fortune for the Good of his Country; but if he can secure himself and his own particular Interests, he does all that is required of him, whatever becomes of his Neighbour or his Country. It appears to me therefore that upon the Principles advanced by this Author, there is no room left for the Exercise of that extensive glorious Benevolence, that publick Spirit, which is one of the noblest Ornaments of the human Nature, and which this Gentleman wou’d be thought so highly to promote and to admire.

But let us suppose that he can, consistently with his other Principles, carry publick Spirit and Benevolence towards Mankind to the greatest Height, yet to make this the whole of Religion is contrary to Reason and the Law of Nature. I shall consider this a little; and the rather because I have observ’d that some, under pretence of crying up Charity or Benevolence towards Mankind, seem to place the whole of our Duty in it, and speak in very diminishing Terms of all that Part of Religion that relates to the Duties we more immediately owe to God; and all upon this Principle, that God is happy in
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himself, and can receive no Benefit from any Worship or Services we can render him.

It must be own'd, that our Author, in several Parts of his Book, seems to speak of the Duties we owe to God as no less a Part of the Law of Nature, than those we owe to our Neighbours; but since there are so many plain and formal Passages, in which he directly places the whole of Religion in doing good to Mankind, and asserts that they that do so fulfil the whole of their Duty, and do all that God requires, many will be apt to think that what he talks of our Duty to God is only to save Appearances; or else that by our Duty to God he means no more than Benevolence to Mankind, this being all that God requires, and the only way by which (as he tells us) we can shew our Gratitude to our Maker. Accordingly he declares, that *the Duty of a truly religious Person, and of a good Subject and Citizen and of a Patriot, are the same with relation to God and Man*, p. 71*. It will be easily acknowledged, that true Religion includes the Duties of a good Subject and Citizen or Patriot; but the Author seems (as far as I can understand him) to intend to make Patriotism and the being a good Subject or Citizen to be the whole of true Religion, and that these are exactly of the same Extent; so that every Man that is a good Subject and Patriot, by that fulfils the Character of a truly religious Man. And yet it must be own'd, that there have been Men that have had a true Love to their Country, and Zeal for its Liberties, that yet have had little Regard to that Part of Religion that relates to the Duties we more immediately owe to God. The Author therefore, if he supposes that to be a Patriot or a good Citizen is to be truly religious, must also suppose that the whole of Religion consists in civil and social Duties. To this purpose he declares, p. 72 †. that "as Man
" is

* P. 60. † P. 61.

“ is qualified by Nature to answer all the Purposes
 “ of a social Life, and to act a Part agreeable to
 “ Reason, so by doing this he gives Glory to his
 “ Maker by fulfilling the End of his Creation.”

And it appears from the Passages above cited, p. 167, 168. to which the Reader is referr'd, that he directly defines Religion to consist in a constant Disposition of Mind to do all the Good we can, viz. to Mankind; and that Religion, as well as Government, was *wholly* ordain'd for Men's mutual Defence; and that by doing good to our Fellow-Creatures we answer the End of our Creation, and *do all that God requires of us*. And whereas Dr. Clark had said, that the Philosophers had no right Knowledge of God's Design in creating Man, he produces a Passage of *Cicero* as containing a just Account of the End for which Man was created; the Design of which Passage is to shew that Men were created for the sake of one another, for their mutual Assistance and Defence. *Ad tuendos conservandosque homines hominem natum esse; homines hominum causa sunt generati, ut ipsi inter se alii aliis prodesse possint. Hominem naturæ obedientem homini nocere non posse.* And then he adds, “ Does not Dr. Clark
 “ maintain the same thing, in saying that God
 “ cou'd have no Motive in creating things at first,
 “ but only that he might communicate to them his
 “ Goodness and Happiness? p. 384*. Now either our Author looks upon this Passage of *Cicero* as containing a full Account of God's Design in creating Man or not. If not, if it only contains a defective Account of the End of Man's Creation, and omits some of the principal and noblest Ends of his Being, then the Doctor's Charge holds good for any thing this Author hath said to the contrary, and this Passage of *Cicero* does by no means prove that he had a just Knowledge of the End for which
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Man was created. But if this Gentleman looks upon this Passage to contain a just and full Account of God's Design in creating Man, as he must if he speaks here at all to the purpose; then the only End for which Men were at all created, was to assist and to do good to one another; and indeed this is what the Author himself directly asserts in several of the Passages above cited; and then he that does this, answers the End of his Being, and fulfils the whole of his Duty, even though he shou'd not acknowledge a God at all, or a Providence, or yield him any Worship. These things may safely and even innocently be neglected, as not properly and immediately belonging to the End for which Man was created. And is not this to destroy at once a considerable Part of what this Gentleman himself elsewhere seems to own to belong to the Law of Nature? Is this the Way he takes to reclaim an ignorant World from Superstition, by letting them know there is no such thing properly as Religion at all, or any immediate Regard due to God, and that provided they be good Neighbours and Citizens, they need not concern themselves about God at all, or any of the Duties of which he is the immediate Object? A goodly Scheme this, which, under pretence of exalted Thoughts of God's Self-sufficiency, or Happiness in himself, is for depriving him of that religious Homage, which is due to him from his reasonable Creatures!

I intirely agree with the learned Dr. *Clark*,
“ That there is no Congruity or Proportion in the
“ uniform Disposition and correspondent Order of
“ any Bodies or Magnitudes; no Fitness or Agree-
“ ment in the Application of similar and equal geo-
“ metrical Figures one to another, or in the com-
“ paring them one with another, so visible and con-
“ spicuous as is the Beauty and Harmony of God's
“ several Attributes meeting with suitable Returns
“ of

“ of Duty and Honour from all his rational Creatures throughout the Universe.” *Disc. nat. and rev. Religion, 7th Edit. p. 198.* And he goes on to shew, from the Consideration of his several Attributes, that it is our Duty to have a perpetual awful Regard for him, to love him, to trust in him, to pay him all possible Honour and Veneration, Adoration and Worship, to employ our whole Beings and all our Faculties in his Service and for his Glory, to pray to him constantly for what we stand in need of, and offer him our heartiest Thanksgivings for whatever good Things we at any time receive.

Indeed these are Duties of perpetual and unalterable Obligation, necessarily resulting from the Relation we stand under to God as our Creator, Preserver and Benefactor, and our moral Governor and Judge, and therefore cannot possibly cease to oblige whilst that Relation subsists; and the Relation subsists in all supposable Circumstances, whilst our Being subsists. To hate God, to blaspheme him, to despise his Authority, must eternally be a Vice and a Crime, and no Alteration of Circumstances can ever make that to be lawful, because it has an intrinsic inseparable Malignity in it. But it is otherwise with respect to many of the Duties we owe to our Fellow-Creatures. It seems therefore very strange that whilst these Gentlemen cry up the Reason and Nature of Things for the eternal Rule and Law, and explain this Nature and Reason of Things to be the Relations and Respects Things bear to one another, and the Fittests arising from those Relations, they yet comparatively make light of those Relations and Fittests that are of all others the strongest, the most inseparable, the most deeply founded, and which cannot cease but with our Beings; when other particular Relations, and the Fittests arising from them, admit of great Variation, and upon an Alteration of Circumstances may cease

to oblige. If there be a Relation between God and Man distinct from the Relation Men bear to one another, then there must be Duties also arising from that Relation to God, distinct from the Duties Men owe to themselves and their Fellow-Creatures; Duties of which God himself is the immediate Object: and if the Relation between God and us is of all others the most sacred and immutable, then the Duties we more immediately owe to him must also be the most sacred Part of our Duty. If therefore the Nature and Reason of Things is the Rule and Law by which Men must govern their Actions, and if it be the Will of God they shou'd do so, then it is his Will, and the End he made them for, that they shou'd act correspondently to the Relation they bear immediately to him as well as to the Relations they bear to one another; and consequently they who do what good they can to themselves and their Fellow-Creatures, except they act also suitably to the Relations they more immediately owe to God, and be careful to render him that Love, Resignation, Adoration and Obedience, which is due to him from his reasonable Creatures, are so far from answering the End of their Creation, that they are very defective in the principal End of it, and in the noblest Part of their Duty.

Nor is it any Objection against this, that God is infinitely happy in himself, and therefore stands in no need of our Services. For it does not follow that because he does not need our Praises and Adorations, therefore we are not obliged to render him any. This wou'd be to make the very Perfection and Excellency of his Nature an Argument for our neglecting him. For the Reason why we cannot profit him is only the transcendent Excellency of his Nature; and this Perfection of his Nature, which raises him above all Possibility of receiving any real Benefit from any thing we can do, does also make
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it most fit and reasonable that we shou'd have the highest Esteem and Veneration for him, and render him that Tribute of Homage and Adoration which is most justly due from reasonable Creatures to the supreme Being. Tho' God be infinitely happy in himself, and does not, in making Creatures, or giving them Laws, design to make any Addition to his own essential Happiness and Perfection, which is impossible; and tho' in this Sense it may be said that God *does not require any thing, no not the Worship we are to render him, or the Faith we are to have in him for his own sake*, (as our Author expresses it, p. 44. *) that is, for his own Benefit, as if he himself were to be a Gainer by it; yet if he makes reasonable Beings, he must require them to act towards him, as becomes reasonable Beings to act towards the supreme universal Lord, their Creator, Preserver, and Benefactor, and must give them such Laws as are agreeable to the just Order of Things and to the Relations between him and them. His being perfectly happy in himself is no Reason for his not requiring of his Creatures such Duties as it is in the Nature of Things fit and reasonable for him to require. Now what can be in itself more fit and reasonable, and more agreeable to the beautiful Order of Things, than that reasonable Creatures, that derive their Beings and all the Blessings they enjoy from God, and continually depend upon him, and who have sublime Faculties capable of contemplating, loving, adoring the supreme Being, shou'd love and serve and worship him above all, and shou'd continually testify their Dependance upon him by their Prayers, and celebrate his transcendent Excellencies and marvelous Benefits by their Praises?

Is it not infinitely just, that we shou'd feel the inward warm Sentiments of Love and Veneration and Gratitude towards that glorious Being? And

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if so, is it not fit that we shou'd exprefs them in the best Manner we are able, by our adoring Praises and Acknowledgements, testifying with a generous Ardor to the whole Creation, as far as our Influence reaches, the Esteem, the Love and Admiration we have for our common Lord? and endeavouring to excite the same pious Sentiments and Affections in others which we feel in our selves, that they may join with us in the same noble and delightful Exercise, and in rendring our united Homage to the Supreme? Is there not an admirable Beauty, a Decency and Congruity in seeing reasonable Creatures thus employ'd? Their Understandings, their Wills and Affections centering on the most excellent of all Objects, their Love and Desires carried forth towards the chiefest Good, the greatest and most perfect Being, the original Goodness and Beauty? Shou'd not a Regard to him run through their whole Behaviour, and be the principal noble Spring of all their Obedience? This must needs be pleasing to God, who takes a divine Complacency in the Beauty, Order, and Felicity of the rational Creation. To suppose God pleas'd with the Prayers and Praises, the Homage proceeding from a Heart sincerely devoted to him, is not to suppose him, as some meanly represent it, *acted by a Love of Fame and Glory*, or as this Author expresses it, p. 46. *subject to the Passions of ambitious and vain-glorious Mortals*; but it is because he delights (and the Perfection of his Nature carries him to do so) in the moral Order and Beauty of Things, in Righteousness and Gratitude, and in seeing his reasonable Creatures employ the excellent Faculties he has given them in the best and properest Manner.

And indeed to suppose a rational Being to have a Regard to his Fellow-Creatures, but no Regard at all to his Maker, is a monstrous Blot and Irregularity in the Creation. Reason leads us to conclude, that the infinitely
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it most fit and reasonable that we shou'd have the highest Esteem and Veneration for him, and render him that Tribute of Homage and Adoration which is most justly due from reasonable Creatures to the supreme Being. Tho' God be infinitely happy in himself, and does not, in making Creatures, or giving them Laws, design to make any Addition to his own essential Happinefs and Perfection, which is impossible; and tho' in this Sense it may be said that God *does not require any thing, no not the Worship we are to render him, or the Faith we are to have in him for his own sake,* (as our Author expresses it, p. 44.*) that is, for his own Benefit, as if he himself were to be a Gainer by it; yet if he makes reasonable Beings, he must require them to act towards him, as becomes reasonable Beings to act towards the supreme universal Lord, their Creator, Preserver, and Benefactor, and must give them such Laws as are agreeable to the just Order of Things and to the Relations between him and them. His being perfectly happy in himself is no Reason for his not requiring of his Creatures such Duties as it is in the Nature of Things fit and reasonable for him to require. Now what can be in itself more fit and reasonable, and more agreeable to the beautiful Order of Things, than that reasonable Creatures, that derive their Beings and all the Blessings they enjoy from God, and continually depend upon him, and who have sublime Faculties capable of contemplating, loving, adoring the supreme Being, shou'd love and serve and worship him above all, and shou'd continually testify their Dependance upon him by their Prayers, and celebrate his transcendent Excellencies and marvelous Benefits by their Praises?

Is it not infinitely just, that we shou'd feel the inward warm Sentiments of Love and Veneration and Gratitude towards that glorious Being? And

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if so, is it not fit that we shou'd expresse them in the best Manner we are able, by our adoring Praises and Acknowledgements, testifying with a generous Ardor to the whole Creation, as far as our Influence reaches, the Esteem, the Love and Admiration we have for our common Lord? and endeavouring to excite the same pious Sentiments and Affections in others which we feel in our selves, that they may join with us in the same noble and delightful Exercise, and in rendring our united Homage to the Supreme? Is there not an admirable Beauty, a Decency and Congruity in seeing reasonable Creatures thus employ'd? Their Understandings, their Wills and Affections centering on the most excellent of all Objects, their Love and Desires carried forth towards the chiefest Good, the greatest and most perfect Being, the original Goodness and Beauty? Shou'd not a Regard to him run through their whole Behaviour, and be the principal noble Spring of all their Obedience? This must needs be pleasing to God, who takes a divine Complacency in the Beauty, Order, and Felicity of the rational Creation. To suppose God pleas'd with the Prayers and Praises, the Homage proceeding from a Heart sincerely devoted to him, is not to suppose him, as some meanly represent it, *acted by a Love of Fame and Glory*, or as this Author expresses it, p. 46. *subject to the Passions of ambitious and vain-glorious Mortals*; but it is because he delights (and the Perfection of his Nature carries him to do so) in the moral Order and Beauty of Things, in Righteousness and Gratitude, and in seeing his reasonable Creatures employ the excellent Faculties he has given them in the best and properest Manner.

And indeed to suppose a rational Being to have a Regard to his Fellow-Creatures, but no Regard at all to his Maker, is a monstrous Blot and Irregularity in the Creation. Reason leads us to conclude, that the infinitely
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wise and perfect Being, in making noble intellectual Creatures, design'd that in their several Orders and Degrees they shou'd tend to him as their common Center, and to him ultimately direct their Views, and not merely to themselves and to one another? Can it be reasonably thought that in creating them he design'd they shou'd have a Regard to one another, and no immediate Regard to him? That their Affections shou'd be carried out towards their Fellow-Creatures, and not principally to him the most perfect of Beings, the kind Parent and sovereign Lord of the Universe, from whom all their Blessings flow, and on whom they constantly depend? Indeed never are reasonable Creatures so happily and gloriously employ'd, as when engag'd in the Contemplation, Love and Adoration of the supreme Being. It is then that the sublime Faculties of the human Soul appear in their proper Glory and Elevation. And if the chief Happiness of reasonable Beings consists in the Exercise of their Powers and Affections on the noblest Objects, then the Exercise of those Duties they more immediately owe to God, tend to their own highest Happiness; so that if God wills their Good and Happiness, (which is the Author's own Supposition) and that they shou'd act up to the Dignity of their Natures, (in which he makes their Happiness to consist, see Chap. 3.) he wills that they shou'd exercise themselves in those Duties that have a more immediate Reference to him, as well as in the Duties that more immediately refer to their Fellow-Creatures.

Those therefore are far from being Friends to Mankind, that lead them to disregard those Duties which have such a Beauty and Excellency in them, which tend so much to the Order and Harmony of the moral World, and to the Satisfaction and Happiness of the reasonable Creatures themselves, and the Exercise of their most delightful Affections.

And

And it is one great Excellency of the Scriptures, that they every where prescribe the Love, the Reverence, the Adoration of the only true God, and furnish us with the best Helps and noblest Patterns of a pure and sublime Devotion.

It is far from my Design to insinuate the least Disregard to that noble Duty of Love and Beneficence towards Mankind; a Thing for which we were evidently design'd. I freely own that it is one excellent End of our Creation to do good to our Fellow-Creatures, to assist one another, and to promote our mutual Interests. But we must not, under Pretence of urging and exalting this, represent it as the whole of our Duty. No where is this mutual Benevolence so strongly recommended, so beautifully exemplified as in the Gospel of Jesus. But it does not cause all our Views to terminate there. It teaches us *to love the Lord our God with all our Hearts, &c.* that this is the first and great Commandment; and then it teaches us also *to love our Neighbours as ourselves*, which it carries much further than this Gentleman, with all his boasted Benevolence, seems willing to do, since it requires us to love and do good even to our Enemies, which he is pleas'd to find fault with. Thus it represents our Duties in their proper beautiful Order and just Harmony. Our Author sometimes makes a Shew of doing this, when he distributes our Duty into that we owe to God, our Neighbours and ourselves. Our Duty therefore to our Neighbours is not all Religion. Why then does he so often represent it so, as if by this alone we answer'd the End of our Creation, and did all that God requires? Is not this to give a very defective Account even of natural Religion, and to lead Men wrong in a Point of great consequence to the Interests of Religion in the World?

I shall conclude my Remarks on the Author's Account of the Principles and Duties of the Law of Nature with some Observations on his boasted Rule, the Usefulness of which he so much extols, p. 345, 349, 350 *. He tells us, that "it is the Tendency of Actions which makes them either good or bad, they that tend to promote human Happiness are always good, and those that have a contrary Tendency are always bad; and 'tis the Circumstances Men are under by which we are to judge of the Tendency of Actions." This is, according to him, "the only standing Law or Rule by which it is the Will of God Men shou'd be directed and govern'd in all Cases;" see p. 18, 19 †. So that after all his Pretences, this is really all that he means by that Law of Nature, the Perfection, Immutability, and Clearness of which he so much extols. And if we are to judge of this Rule or Law by the Maxims our Author advances, "that the only innate Principle in Man is the Desire of his own Happiness;" and that "according to the Sense Men have of their own Happiness, and of the Means that naturally tend to promote it, they will assuredly attain the Knowledge of their respective Duties;" we must explain it thus, that every Man must judge of his Duty and of the Goodness of Actions, by their Tendency to promote his own particular Happiness in the Circumstances he is in. And if this be the only standing Rule or Law by which Men are to be directed, if every Man must be left to judge of Good or Evil by what he apprehends to be for his own Advantage, or the contrary, in the Circumstances he is under, which Circumstances, as the Author himself tells us, are *continually changing*, p. 18. if there be no more fixed Rules for the Morality of Actions, it will be left very loose and undeterminate.

But

* P. 312. † P. 16.

* But that we may the better judge of the Usefulness of this Rule, let us consider the Application he himself makes of it. It is this, according to him, must direct us when we are to speak Truth. For it may be lawful, and even a Duty when we apprehend that our Good requires it, to speak contrary to Truth and our own Sentiments; see p. 347 *. He there tells us, that "though Speech was given Men to communicate their Thoughts, and 'tis generally for their common Good that Men shou'd speak as they think, yet this common Good prescribes certain Restrictions." He here indeed mentions the *common Good*, but it appears from what he afterwards offers on this Head, that he thinks also Men's own particular or private Good to be a sufficient Reason for speaking contrary to Truth. But what does he mean here by the *common Good*? If he means the common Good of the World, or of Mankind, I think it might be easily shewn, that it is for the common Good of all Mankind that the Laws of Truth shou'd be constantly observ'd; and though this may, in particular Instances, bring Inconveniences, yet if Men wou'd not allow themselves to tell Lyes on any Occasion, it wou'd be highly for the Benefit of the World in general. But if by *common Good* he means only that which seems in a particular Instance to be for the Good of the Nation or Community to which we belong, then what he calls the common Good is really no other than the private Advantage of that particular Nation or Society. And if Truth and Sincerity may be violated as often as they seem in a particular Instance to be for the Benefit of any particular Community, I don't see how the publick Faith of Nations can be preserv'd; since one Nation or Community has as much a Right to practise this Maxim as another, and so all Nations are left to break their Faith whenever they think it

for their Advantage to do so. And if this be lawful for a larger Society with respect to another such Society, why not also to lesser Societies with regard to one another; and if for Families, why not also for particular Persons? And indeed so the Author seems to take it, as will appear afterwards. But let us proceed to the Instances he mentions. “ Deceiving
 “ an Enemy (says he) in a just War, either by
 “ Words or Actions; if it tends to bring about
 “ the End of War, Peace, is certainly a Duty.” Here he makes it not only lawful, but a Duty, to deceive an Enemy whether by Words or Actions; and all the Restriction he adds is only this, *if it tends to bring about the End of War, Peace*: so that, according to him, any Breach of Word or Promise, or even of an Oath, if it tends to bring about the End of War, Peace, is not only lawful but a Duty. What a wide Door does this open! But is not the Breach of Faith counted base, even in an Enemy? And I am persuaded that, in the common Judgment of Mankind, those wou’d be justly censur’d and despis’d that wou’d make use of such unfair and dishonourable Methods, as this Gentleman here not only allows but prescribes.

He goes on, “ And the same Reason obliges
 “ People not to keep those Promises, though sworn
 “ to, which they have been forc’d to make to Rob-
 “ bers and Thieves.” Here again he represents People as not only allow’d, but *oblig’d* to break their Words and Oaths made to Thieves and Robbers; but this is not true, except the Matter of the Oath or Promise be unlawful. It does not cease to oblige merely because made to a Thief or Robber. For at that rate we must judge of the Obligation of an Oath merely by the Condition of the Person to whom it is made; but if the Matter of the Oath or Promise be in itself lawful, and subjects those that have made it, not to a Crime, but only to an Incon-
 convenience,

venience, it binds to a Performance; and if the Matter of the Oath or Promise be in itself unlawful, the making such a Promise or Oath was a Fault, though the Constraint they were under may furnish some Excuse for it. I cannot but approve what the learned Dr. *Clark* says on this Head, *Disc. Nat. and Rev. Religion*, p. 224. “He who thinks it right and just, upon account of publick Utility, to break Faith (suppose) with a Robber, let him consider that ’tis much more useful to do the same by a Multitude of Robbers, by Tyrants, by a Nation of Robbers; and then all Faith is evidently at an end. For *mutato nomine de te*.——” “What Fidelity and Truth are, is understood by every Man; but between two Nations at war, who shall be Judge which of them are the Robbers? Besides, to rob a Man of Truth and of eternal Happiness, is worse than robbing him of his Money and of his temporal Happiness; and therefore it will be said, that Hereticks may even more justly, and with much greater Utility to the Publick, be deceiv’d and destroy’d by Breach of Truth and Faith, than the most cruel Robbers. Where does this terminate?”

That this is a very just Observation, will appear by considering what our Author further offers; “And some (says he) go so far as to think that those who wou’d force others to declare their Opinions to their own prejudice, in such Matters where the Government has no Concern, have no more Right to Truth than Robbers and other publick Enemies.” It is plain, from his Manner of introducing this, that this is his own Sentiment. As he thinks that Robbers and other *publick Enemies have no Right to Truth*, that is, that it is lawful to lye and to swear falsely to them; so also that Men may lawfully do the same to all that they apprehend erect an unwarrantable Tyranny over them, and wou’d force them to

declare their Opinions to their own prejudice: It is lawful in such Cases for Men to give a wrong Account of their Opinions; to profess, and, if requir'd, to swear that they believe that to be true which they believe to be false. And if this be the Case, I don't wonder that this Gentleman, and those of his Complexion, make the Constancy of the Martyrs, that have suffered great Hardships, and expos'd themselves to Death itself for the sake of Truth and a good Conscience, the Subject of their Ridicule. And the same Reasoning wou'd extend to all that we apprehend make unreasonable Demands upon us, even in civil and political Matters; it might be equally said, according to this Author, that they *have no Right to Truth*; and therefore that it is lawful to flatter a Tyrant, and declare for the Principles of Tyranny, if requir'd to do so, yea and to swear to them too rather than run any Hazard; a Thing which I am perswaded many of the brave *Greeks* and *Romans*, whom this Gentleman so much admires, wou'd have scorn'd and abhorr'd. I don't see but his Principles would allow him to act the Part of a consummate Hypocrite, and to sacrifice Truth, Honour and Conscience to his own Ease and Safety.

He goes on, "Friendship (says he) will sometimes oblige Men to deceive People when it manifestly tends to their Good, and none are prejudic'd by it; and all practise it with relation to Children, sick People and Men in Passion." But I think the Benefit that can accrue to Children, in any Instance, by deceiving them with Lyes and false Promises, is not equivalent to the Prejudice it may do them; and those certainly most consult their Benefit who take care, by their own Practice, as well as Instructions, to bring them up to a Horror for a Lye, and a strict Regard to Truth and Honour. Our Author allows and even requires us, in many Cases, to tell Lyes not only to *sick People*,
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but to Men in Passion; and why not also to Men under the Influence of any strong Appetite, or engag'd in any warm Pursuit of Ambition, Avarice, or Pleasure? he thinks *we are oblig'd to deceive People* with Lyes and Falshoods when it tends to their Good; and if we may be oblig'd to do so for the Good of others, why not also for our own? It will be easily own'd that a Lye may, in many Cases, answer a present End or Convenience, either to our selves or others; and if it must be allow'd as often as it does so, this is to give a large Scope to Falshood and Deceit; it is to suppose that a Lye is in it self a Matter of mere Indifference, neither Good nor Evil, but as it is circumstanc'd, and that Truth is so too; so that they are both put upon a level, neither of them good or bad in their own Nature; and then I can't see why a Lyar shou'd be so base and infamous a Character in all Ages. But if a Lye be in it self evil, then it is not to be allow'd, because it may, in some particular Cases, seem to answer a good End; tho' certainly it never tends to the Good of the Whole.

The Author adds, " must he not be an ill Man
" indeed who wou'd not save an innocent Per-
" son by telling his Pursuer a Falshood! this is a
" Duty he owes to both, the Pursuer and Pursued."
This is the strongest Case he puts, and if he confin'd it to such extraordinary Instances he wou'd have been more excusable. But might not a Man refuse to declare to the Pursuer which way the innocent Person took? in this Case he wou'd neither tell a Falshood, nor endanger the Life of the Innocent. Let us suppose a Man put to his Oath in this matter, must he also forswear himself for so good an End? This Author must undoubtedly say, upon his Principles, that he ought to do so; and if a Man may swear falsely to save the Life of another, much more to save his own: and if it once be allow'd to swear falsely to

save our own or others Lives, why not to save our own or others worldly Substance or Reputation, which to many are as dear as their Lives? And thus all Reverence for an Oath will be lost amongst Men.

But our Author proceeds. "And if Men (as none scruple it) may bid their Servants say, they are not at home, and do several other things of this nature; why may they not, when Silence shall be interpreted to their prejudice, deceive impertinent People in such Matters wherein they have no Concern?" He ought not so positively to pronounce, that none scruple to bid their Servants say they are not at home when they are so. I know many that justly scruple it. And if Truth may be sacrificed on such little Occasions, it will soon lead to Matters of greater Consequence. He adds, that *Men do several other things of this nature*; and if they do, it only shews that there is not such a Regard to Truth as there ought to be amongst Mankind; and the Author's Maxims are not likely to promote it. He does not explain what *those several other Things are*, but leaves the Matter at large, that People may act in them as they think fit; but he allows Persons, "when Silence shall be interpreted to their prejudice, to deceive impertinent People [by telling them Falshoods] in such Matters wherein they have no concern." That is, we are allow'd to lye and to deceive, to speak Things which we know to be false, on every Occasion, as often as we think it for our Convenience to do so. And is not this utterly to lose the Horror of a Lye, to look upon it as an indifferent Thing, and in effect to banish Truth out of the World? If these Maxims of our Author were generally allow'd and maintain'd, no Man's Veracity, no Man's Word or Oath cou'd be depended on, all publick and private Faith, all Credit and Confidence wou'd be lost amongst Men. For if a Man may innocently lye and deceive for so small a matter as to get rid of Impertinence, he may

may do it much more to save his worldly Goods, or his Reputation, or uphold the Credit of a Party, and indeed whenever he thinks it for his Interest and Convenience to do so.

The Author adds; " Thus you see there are certain Exceptions to this Rule, (*viz.* of speaking Truth) which as well as the Rule it self are built on the Good of Mankind." But these *certain Exceptions to the Rule* which he speaks of, do effectually destroy it; and shew that this Gentleman looks upon Truth and Falshood to be Matters of mere Indifference, and only to be measured by a Man's Convenience in the Circumstances he is under. I wou'd fain know what he thinks of the Veracity of God, whether it is contrary to his Nature to lye and to deceive; he seems to suppose that this is an evident Principle, p. 65. and in other Passages; and why so, but because Veracity and Faithfulness is a Perfection, and to lye is in itself a base thing morally evil, and therefore it is impossible for God to lye? And if it be, and if Religion obliges us, as this Author frequently intimates, to an Imitation of the Deity, why not also to imitate him in his Veracity and Truth?

But, says he, *these Exceptions are built on the Good of Mankind.* They may indeed in particular Instances be for the present Advantage of particular Persons; but I can't help thinking that that Maxim of the Psalmist, when he gives it as the Character of a good Man, that he *speaketh the Truth from his Heart, and sweareth to his own Hurt and changeth not*, not only is more noble in it self, but vastly more for the general Good of Mankind. And if it were once fix'd as a sacred Principle, that a Man is never to put a known Falshood upon others upon any Pretence whatsoever, it might indeed in some particular Instances produce Inconveniences to particular Persons, but it wou'd be of
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the greatest Benefit to Society in general, and wou'd have a manifest Tendency to banish Fraud and Falshood from among Men. Let us suppose two Societies, the one governing themselves by a strict Regard to Truth, and looking upon it as always sacred, never to be transgress'd upon any Occasion; the other govern'd by our Author's Maxims, that Truth is to be measur'd by every Man's Convenience; I may safely leave it to any Man to judge in which of those Societies there wou'd be the most Sincerity, Plainness, Honesty, and Integrity; and in consequence of this, mutual Confidence and Union among themselves and Credit with their Neighbours; and in which, on the contrary, there wou'd be most Hypocrisy, Fraud, Deceit, mutual Diffidence and Distrust, and consequently Breach of Union among themselves, and Want of Credit among others.

Our Author concludes with assuring us, that “these Exceptions do by no means justify mental “Reservations or Equivocations.” But I think no Jesuit ever carried his Doctrine on this Head further than this Gentleman, or made larger Allowances for Falshood and Deceit. I don't see but upon his Principles he may prove it to be not only lawful but a Duty to lye and to equivocate, if it be for any good End to himself or others; and what wou'd the most prevaricating Jesuit desire more? The same Principles wou'd justify the breaking Faith with Hereticks, provided a Man can but bring himself to think them as pernicious as Thieves, or as Tyrants and Imposers, or *any other publick Enemies*, which a Jesuit wou'd find no great difficulty to do. For such Persons, according to our Author, have no Right to Truth, no nor Men in a Passion, or impertinent People, &c. The greatest Lyar will be ready to speak Truth, when he thinks it for his Benefit in the Circumstances he is in, and I don't

see that our Author requires more. He is therefore the unfittest Man in the World to find so much fault as he does with the pious Frauds of Ecclesiasticks, since it may be easily prov'd, upon his Principles, that a Lye in many Cases, when it is for a good End, is not only lawful but meritorious.

The Author supposes, that this Rule of the Tendency of Actions to a Man's Happiness in the Circumstances he is in, must also direct him when and how far he is to gratify his Passions. Every Man must be left to judge for himself how far in any particular Instance it may *conduce to his Reason, Health, and the Pleasure of his Senses, taken and compared together*; this is all the Law he has to govern him in this matter; and considering the strong Influence that the Appetites generally have over the Reason, it might be fear'd that it wou'd generally bring it over to judge in their own favour.

But let us see how this Gentleman himself applies this Rule. He tells us, " that enjoying a Woman, or
" lusting after her, can't be said, without considering
" the Circumstances, to be either good or evil; that
" warm Desire which is implanted in human Nature,
" can't be criminal, when pursued after such a man-
" ner, as tends most to promote the Happiness of the
" Persons, and to propagate and preserve the Spe-
" cies, p. 345 *." These then are all the Restrictions he prescribes, and of which every Man is to be Judge, according to the Circumstances he is under. If the Species be propagated and preserv'd, and the Pleasure of the Parties be promoted, this is all that is requir'd. I don't see but he leaves room for Fornication, yea and in some Cases for Adultery too, according to the Circumstances Persons may be in. This Writer elsewhere advances it as a Charge against the Laws of the Gospel, that they are too general and undeterminate, but his own Rules
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are vastly more so; and I am afraid that the true Ground of the Quarrel that many have with the Gospel-Precepts, is for being too particular, and determining our Duty and restraining our Appetites in some Instances which these Gentlemen wou'd rather have left at large. I shall not enter on a more particular Examination of this at present, but only observe, that considering the Strength of the sensual Appetites and Passions, if every Man was left to gratify and indulge his Appetites as far as he himself thinks reasonable, and most conducive to his Happiness in the Circumstances he is in, without any further Law to direct and govern him, it wou'd soon produce universal Dissoluteness and Confusion.



C H A P. VIII.

That he deprives the Law of Nature of its strongest Sanctions; and that his Scheme tends to take away the Fear of God, and to make Men easy in their Sins.

HAVING consider'd the Account the Author gives of the Duties of the Law of Nature, I shall now proceed to consider what he offers concerning the Sanctions of that Law; and as under the former Head it appears that the Author advances Principles which tend to lead Men wrong in their Notions of the Duties to which they are oblig'd by the Law of Nature, so I believe it will appear that he in effect destroys those Sanctions which shou'd enforce the Observance of that Law; and consequently notwithstanding the mighty Zeal he professes for it, leaves it naked and defenceless, and disarms it of its strongest Supports. And here I must refer the Reader to the Passages produc'd

produc'd above, p. 168, 169, 170. where they are laid together in one View.

A Law may be justly said to be left naked and defenceless, if it may be violated with Impunity; if either no Punishments be threatned at all, or none that are capable of deterring Persons from transgressing it. And the Author's Scheme seems to me to be plainly calculated to take away the Dread of divine Punishments, and consequently to make Sinners easy in their Crimes. This particularly seems to be the Tendency of his 4th Chapter, the Title of which runs thus; "That not only the Matter of
" all God's Laws, but the Penalties annex'd to
" them, are for the Good of Mankind, even of those
" who suffer for the Breach of them." Accordingly he will not allow, that *in punishing those who violate his Laws God acts from a Regard to his own Honour, and the Dignity of his Laws and Government*; nor that he ever punishes them as for *an Injury done to himself, distinct from the Harm that accrues by the Breach of them to his Creatures*, p. 37, 38*. But will this Author indeed deny that there is any such thing as a Dignity belonging to the divine Laws and Government? This were in my Opinion to deny that there are any Laws of God, or that there is any divine Government at all. For if there be a Government, there is a Dignity belonging to that Government; and if there be Laws, there is an Authority belonging to those Laws, and a Regard due to them. If God has given Laws, I suppose it must be own'd to be the Creature's Duty to regard and to obey them as his Laws; and if he enforces those Laws by his own Authority, I suppose that it is his Will that his Creatures shou'd regard them as forc'd by that Authority; but it seems, according to this Author, that though they are his own Laws, and forc'd by his Authority, he

* P. 32,

he must not have any Regard to his own Authority in punishing the Breach of them. This seems to be a strange self-confounding Scheme. There is a supreme Legislator, but no Dignity annex'd to that Character, or at least he must have no Regard to it in his Conduct, as a Reason in any Instance for his Proceedure. There is a Government, but no Authority belonging to it, or at least he must not act out of a Regard to that Authority, or use any Methods to support and maintain it. There are Laws which God has given, but for his own part he is unconcern'd whether those Laws be observ'd or not. A Legislator without Dignity, a Government without Rights, a Law but without Authority. A strange Representation this of the divine Government, and all under pretence of magnifying it!

But does not this Writer himself in this very Chapter, and in the same Page, talk of the *Dignity of the Divine Legislator, his Laws and Government*, when he saith, p. 38. "God does not
 " make Laws for one End, and require the observ-
 " ing them for another, this being inconsistent with
 " the Dignity of the divine Legislator, his Laws
 " and Government?" Where he supposes, that there is a Dignity belonging to the divine Legislator, his Government and Laws, and that nothing is to be admitted which is inconsistent with it. Now if there be such a thing as the Dignity of the divine Legislator, his Laws and Government, must there not be a Regard to it in the divine Actings in the Government of the World? Does not this Gentleman often talk of the Nature and Reason of things, as the Rule of God's Actions, and explain this to be the Relations and Respects of things, and the Fitnesses arising from them? And does not the very Nature and Reason of things require, that if God be the Supreme Governor of the World, he shou'd act as becomes that Character? And what is more
 becoming

becoming that Character and Relation, than to take the most proper Methods to preserve the Majesty of his Government, and when once he hath made Laws, to vindicate and maintain the Authority of those Laws?

Our Author indeed saith, that “neither in punishing nor rewarding can God act as a Party, much less as an injur’d Party who wants Satisfaction and Reparation of Honour, p. 38.” But if by God’s acting as a Party be meant (as must be meant in the present Debate) his acting as the wise and righteous Governor of the World, ’tis certain God acts as a Party, or what is usually called the *Pars imperans*, and he will do nothing but what becomes that Character, and is suitable to that Relation. If as the Governor of the World he enacts Laws for his reasonable Creatures, then as the Governor of the World it concerns him to see those Laws executed, and to vindicate the Authority of those Laws; and if by *Satisfaction and Reparation of Honour* be meant the taking such Methods as are most proper to preserve and maintain the sacred Majesty of his Government, and vindicate those Laws from Contempt, his insisting on Satisfaction or Reparation in this Sense is highly becoming him as the supreme Governor of the World, and a contrary Conduct wou’d be unbecoming his Character. Not that he does this merely out of a Regard to the *Opinion of others*, or a *Love of Fame and Glory* (as this Gentleman thinks fit to represent it) but the Excellency of his own Nature, which is an eternal and indispensable Law to him, always carries him to do what is worthy of him, and most becoming his glorious Greatness, his infinite Purity, his governing Wisdom and Justice as well as Goodness.

But what Reason does this Author give, why *God cannot want any Satisfaction or Reparation of Honour,*

nour, that is, in other Words, why he must not take any Methods to vindicate his own Authority and Government, and maintain the Majesty of his Laws? The Reason is in short this, because no Sin can be an injury to him. But if God is to be consider'd as the Supreme Governor of the World, then as Governor of the World he is injur'd, when his Authority is contemned and his Laws violated.

But let us consider more particularly what this Gentleman offers on this Head. He tells us, that "as God can never be injur'd, he can never want
"Reparation." That "he who is infinitely satisfied in himself, can gain no Addition of Satisfaction by his Creatures observing his Laws; nor
"can he, by their not observing them, be reduc'd
"to a Condition of wanting Satisfaction or Reparation of Honour, or any of those things which
"depending on the Opinion of others are main Ingredients of human Happiness, p. 38*." And again, that "God can neither be made angry, provoked, nor griev'd by the Conduct of us wretched
"Mortals, for then he cou'd not enjoy a Moment's
"Quiet; nor has he any Comfort or Satisfaction
"to gain from the Thoughts and Actions of his
"Creatures; for then he wou'd never be without
"an Infinity of them jointly contributing to that
"End, p. 39†.

It will easily be granted that God cannot receive any Addition to his essential Felicity by the Services or good Actions of his Creatures, nor suffer any Diminution of it by their Sins; that is, nothing that his Creatures can do for or against him can render him more or less perfect than he always is, because he is always in himself infinitely perfect, and therefore is always in himself infinitely happy. And this is all that is intended in the Passage produc'd by the Author out of the Book of *Job*, Chap. 35. 6, 7, 8.
the

* P. 33. † P. 34.

the Design of which is plainly to shew that the Creatures cannot bring God under any Obligation by any thing they are capable of doing, as if he really needed their Services, as we do the good Offices of our Fellow-Creatures, and cou'd not be happy without them. But tho' he is infinitely happy in himself and in his own glorious incomparable Perfections, yet under this Pretence to represent him as not concerning himself with Mankind, as having no Complacency in their good Actions, nor displeas'd and offended with their evil ones, wou'd be under pretence of magnifying the divine Happiness to strike at all Religion. This was the old *Epicurean* Scheme, *nec bene promeritis capitur, nec tangitur ira*, which was design'd to destroy a Providence. If God beholds the good and evil Actions of his Creatures, either he is pleas'd with the one, and displeas'd with the other, or he regards them both alike; and then it must be said, either that there is no real Difference between them, which is to confound the Reasons of Things, and to destroy all Difference between Virtue and Vice, or that God does not judge of things as they really are. This Gentleman himself frequently talks of what is pleasing or displeasing to God in the Actions of his Creatures (as I shall shew afterwards) which is in effect to say the same thing that here he finds fault with. If he says it is not on his own Account, but for the Benefit or Hurt accruing from thence to his Creatures, that he is pleas'd or displeas'd; yet still if the good Actions of his Creatures be pleasing to him at all on whatever Account, it must be said that he is pleas'd with them; and if their evil Actions be displeasing to him on whatever Account, still it must be said that he is displeas'd with them, which yet he seems here to represent as inconsistent with the essential Happiness of the divine Nature.

If there be a God at all, he cannot but take a divine Delight and Complacency in whatever is just and fit, in the Order and moral Beauty of things, in what is *fair and shapely and amiable, apart from the deform'd, the foul, the odious*, to use Lord Shaftsbury's Expressions. This is founded in the infinite Perfection and Rectitude and Goodness of his own Mind. How then can we possibly conceive of him otherwise, but that he must take a Complacency and Satisfaction in beholding his Creatures acting up to the Dignity of their Natures, and doing what is fit and reasonable for them to do towards him and towards one another?

But is not this to suppose (according to our Author) that he has *an Addition of Satisfaction by his Creatures observing his Laws*, and that he *has Comfort and Satisfaction to gain from their Thoughts and Actions*? It is indeed certain that God can receive no Accession to his essential Felicity; and therefore it seems not very proper to talk of his gaining an Addition of Satisfaction; but we must not under this Pretence deny a thing which is evident to the common Reason of Mankind, and that is, that God has a Complacency in the good Dispositions and Actions of his Creatures; and yet this is, according to our Manner of Conception, something distinct from the Complacency that arises properly and immediately from his own infinite Excellencies. The Author's way of arguing wou'd be as good to prove that God takes no delight in the Happiness of his Creatures, as that he has no Satisfaction in their Services; and yet it is scarce possible for us to conceive the Goodness of God as taking no Complacency in his Creatures Happiness; and for any, under pretence of asserting that he is infinitely happy in himself, to say he is indifferent to the Happiness or Misery of his Creatures, equally affected to the one and the other, wou'd be to make a strange Representation

presentation of the Divine Nature; and yet it might be said, if God delight in their Happiness, is not this to suppose that he has an Addition of Satisfaction from the Happiness of his Creatures? Indeed it is very easy for us, when we are speaking of the Divine Nature, to run into such Difficulties as these, which are owing to the Incomprehensibleness of the Subject, and the Narrowness of our own Understandings.

Our Author urges, "If God cou'd have any Satisfaction to gain from the Thoughts and Actions of his Creatures, he wou'd never be without an infinity of them jointly contributing to this End." But this way of arguing may be easily turn'd upon himself. He supposes that it was the Goodness of God that prompted him to make Creatures, that he might communicate Happiness to them; and might it not be said, that if so, since he was equally good from all Eternity, he wou'd never be without an infinite Number of Creatures to whom he might communicate Happiness? Whatever Answer he gives to this, will equally serve the other. Indeed God's making Creatures at such a Time must be resolv'd wholly into his most wise Counsels, of which we are not the proper Judges, and for which we may be sure he had good Reasons, tho' we don't know them.

Whatever Reasons prove that God cannot but take a Complacency in what is morally good and fit, beautiful and regular, do equally prove that he cannot but be displeas'd (though he cannot, strictly speaking, be griev'd) with what is contrary to it, and therefore with the Sins of his Creatures. And if he be displeas'd with them, he will manifest that Displeasure in that way and manner that seems most fit to his infinite Wisdom and Righteousness, and that becomes him as the most wise and just Governor of the World.

But says this Author, "No Man breaks the divine Laws out of Contempt to his Maker, or "imagines he can do God an Injury, p. 38*." Thus this great Reformer of Mankind, all whose Religion is Morality, shews his Zeal for the Cause of Virtue by making an Apology for Sin; he does what he can to cause Men to entertain slight Thoughts of the Evil of Sin, a thing which Men are too apt to do of themselves, and don't need this Author to instruct them in. Is this the Service he does to Mankind, instead of creating an Abhorrence of Vice and Sin, to do all that lies in his power to palliate the Malignity of it?

He says, *No Man breaks the divine Laws out of Contempt to his Maker.* But if Men believe that God gave them Laws, requiring such a Conduct from them, and yet go on in a contrary Conduct, neglecting what he commands, and committing what he forbids; if for some private sorry Interests of their own, or for the Gratification of some base Appetite, they violate what they know to be the Laws of their Maker, is not this shewing a Contempt of those Laws, and is not a Contempt of those Laws a Contempt of him that gave them, and a despising his Authority? Is it not a preferring their own Wills and Appetites to his most wise and righteous Will, and an arraigning his Wisdom or his Goodness? Is it not a Contempt of him, to act as if he had no Authority over us, or as if it were an indifferent or small Matter whether his Laws were observ'd or not? Is it not a Contempt of him, to act as if we neither valued his Favour, nor fear'd his Displeasure? Nor wou'd it at all mend the Matter, though in Words we profess'd the greatest Veneration for him; for to profess a great Regard for him, and at the same time to have no Regard at all to what he requires, wou'd only be to add Mockery to Disobedience.

It is nothing to the purpose whether Sin can do God any real Hurt. If it do not, no thanks to the Sinner; for the natural Tendency of Sin is to make God unhappy, if he were capable of being so; it is a striking at his Authority and Laws, and if it cannot hurt his Being, it is owing to the infinite Perfection of his Nature. It is a strange way the Author takes to diminish the Evil of Sin, under pretence of exalted Thoughts of the infinite Perfection of that God, against whom it is committed, and whose Laws are violated. The only Reason why Sin cannot really hurt him, is because of the transcendent Excellency of his Nature; and shall this be a Reason why his Authority may be safely contemned, and his Law transgress'd with impunity? That very Perfection of his Nature, which makes it impossible for his Creatures to hurt him by their Sins, does also increase the Malignity of their Offences against him, and makes it impossible for him not to hate Sin, which is the most monstrous Breach of all the Rules of Order. And if he hates Sin, this will carry him to do all that is proper for him as a moral Governor to hinder it, and shew his Displeasure against it; and that is by threatening awful Punishments to the Violators of his Laws. And if it be just and necessary, as it is on many Accounts, to threaten those Punishments, then his own Authority and Majesty, the Declaration of his Justice and Righteousness, as well as the deterring others from offending, requires that those Threatnings shou'd be ordinarily executed, and that they shou'd not be dispens'd with but upon Terms consistent with the great Ends of his Government, and with the Authority of his Laws.

What can be more worthy of God, than to let all the World see how sacred and inviolable are the Rights of his Government, and what a horrid thing it is, and how displeasing to him, for a Creature to rise up against the Author of its Being, the sovereign

Lord, and supreme Good? Besides, that this is highly fit and reasonable in it self, it is evident that the Peace, the Order, and Harmony of the moral World very much depends upon preserving a due Reverence for God in the Minds of his Creatures, and keeping up the Authority and Dignity of his Laws. As in the natural World, if God's sustaining Influence was substracted, the Order of Things wou'd soon be dissolv'd, and the Frame of Nature confounded; so it is a Regard to the Deity, his Authority and Laws, which maintains a just Order in the moral World, and without which it cou'd not long subsist. And whosoever attempts to diminish the Horror of Sin, and Men's Reverence for the divine Authority, and to teach Men to look upon the Transgression of the divine Law as a slight thing, and no more than the Offence of one Creature against another, seems to me to strike at all Order at once. It is an Attempt to banish a Regard for the Deity, the Fear of God from amongst Men, and to dissolve the original Bonds that keep up the Order and Harmony of the moral World.

This seems to me to be the manifest Tendency of this Gentleman's Scheme. He will not allow that God punishes those *who violate his Laws as for an Injury done to himself, distinct from the Harm that by the Breach of them accrues to his Creatures*; I ask therefore, does all the Malignity of Sin consist wholly in the Harm it does to the Creatures? Does it derive no Malignity at all from its being a Transgression of the divine Law, and a Contempt of the divine Authority? If not, is not this to say there is no such thing as a Sin against God at all? nor ought Sinners ever to acknowledge and confess that they have sinned against God, or be at all concern'd on this account. And so the Author has found out an admirable Expedient to make Persons easy in their Crimes, by telling them that they need not be concern'd;

cern'd; there is no such thing as a Creature's sinning against God; and if there be no such thing, then certainly they need not fear being punish'd for it. But if there be no Sins against God, this is to deny that there are any Duties owing to God, which is in effect to deny that there is a God that governs the World. So that we see where this fine Scheme ends at last. For if there be a God that governs the World and has given us Laws, then there are Duties we properly owe him, and to transgress the Laws he has given, is truly and properly to sin against God; and if it be a vile and monstrous thing, as it manifestly is, for his reasonable Creatures to oppose their Wills to the Supreme, to resist his Authority, and to refuse to be govern'd by his Laws, then certainly a just and righteous God, who judges of things as they are, will regard it in this View, and will consequently punish it in this View and under this Consideration; and therefore will punish Sin not merely as a Harm done to the Creatures, but as a most unjust and ungrateful Opposition to his own Government and Laws, and an Indignity offer'd to his supreme Authority.

When therefore this Author asserts that *upon his own Account God can't be in the least affected whether his Laws be observ'd or not*, p. 38*. if his Meaning be (as it seems to be his Intention) that God has no Regard at all in this Matter to the Dignity of his own Authority and Government, it is false. It may be said, that, *on his own Account*, that is, on Account of the transcendent Excellency of his own Nature, he will do whatever is fit and proper for him to do, as the wise and righteous Governor of the World, and whatever becomes his own glorious Perfections. This Gentleman himself owns, that "that Justice, whereby God is righteous in all his
" Actions, is eternally inherent in the divine Na-
P 4 " ture,

“ ture, p. 41. that “ the Happiness of God consists in his Rectitude, and in his acting according to the all-comprehending Reason of his own Mind, p. 23 *. “ that cou’d we suppose him to act otherwise (than as his own Reason directs, and than according to the Purity and Rectitude of his own Nature) “ he wou’d be as unhappy as now he is “ happy, p. 25 †. that it is a Contradiction to his “ Nature to do any thing that is not fit and reasonable, p. 26 ‡.” And is there any thing more fit and reasonable, or, to use the Author’s Phrase, more conformable to the Nature and Reason of Things, than that an infinitely perfect and righteous Being shou’d love Righteousness and hate all Iniquity; or that the most wise Governor of the World, when he has given Laws to his Creatures for the Rule of their Conduct, shou’d vindicate the Authority of those Laws, and not suffer them to be trampled upon with Impunity? and when his reasonable Creatures rise up in opposition to his Authority, shou’d testify his Displeasure against such a Conduct? If, on all these Accounts, to punish Sin and manifest his Displeasure against it be to act in conformity to the Fitness of Things, to the Rectitude of his own Nature, and to the Reason of his own all-comprehending Mind; then, by the Author’s own Definition of the divine Happiness, his own Happiness will ingage him to do so: and tho’ Sin cannot hurt him or make him miserable, yet since (as he owns) to act contrary to his own Reason and Rectitude wou’d make him so; it follows, that if his own infinite Wisdom and Righteousness sees it proper for him to punish Sin and manifest his Displeasure against it, not to do this wou’d be acting contrary to the Reason of his own Mind, to his own Purity and Rectitude, and consequently wou’d be contrary to his Happiness.

* P. 19.

† P. 21.

‡ P. 22.

'Tis true he *takes no pleasure in Punishment as such* (that is, merely as it makes any Creature miserable) and in this respect it may be said, that he *cannot hate any thing he hath made*, as this Author speaks, p. 42 *. But though he delights not in the Punishment of Sinners, as tending to make them miserable, yet he may delight in it as it is a Vindication of his own sacred Rights, as it tends to the Preservation of Order, and the Authority of his Laws, and therefore is most becoming his excellent Greatness and Wisdom and Purity; in a word, as it is acting worthy of himself, which can't but yield Complacency and Delight to the best of Beings. And in this Sense those Scriptures are to be understood, which represent God as delighting in executing his just Vengeance, and satisfying himself in the Punishment of Sinners.

Our Author frequently represents the sacred Writings, as ascribing the worst Passions of the human Nature to God. This he often repeats, particularly in his 13th Chapter, where he saith, "that many Texts do, in the plainest manner, ascribe human Passions, even of the worst kind, to God;" and asks, "what Notions must the Vulgar have of God, if the Light of Nature can't direct them right, when they find he is said to be jealous, and furious? see p. 251 †. And again, p. 205 ‡. that "the Scripture, taken literally, gives the Vulgar false and unworthy Notions of the divine Nature, by imputing almost every where to God—even the worst of human Passions." He here evidently refers to those Passages of Scripture that express his Resentment against Sinners, and Resolution to punish them, and the Effects of his Justice, under the Epithets of Wrath, Fury, &c. And he represents the *common Systems of Divinity* (that is, those that talk of God's punishing Sin out of

* P. 36. † P. 225, 226. ‡ P. 181.

of a Regard to the Dignity of his Laws and Government, &c.) as representing God *full of Wrath and Fury, ready to glut himself with Revenge for the Injuries he has suffer'd by the Breach of his Laws,* p. 40 *. as *cloathing him with the worst of our Infirmities,* and representing him as *an ambitious, suspicious, wrathful and revengeful Being,* p. 39 †. and again, as *bating the Creatures he hath made, or as subject to such Weakness or Impotence as to act arbitrarily, or out of Spite, Wrath, Revenge or Self-interest,* p. 42 ‡.

It is very easy to heap up such Expressions as these, which only shew the Injustice of this Author, and the strange Liberties he allows himself in misrepresenting the Sense of those whom he thinks fit to oppose. At this rate it is but bestowing a hard Name upon them, and the most glorious Actions shall pass for Crimes. It is but calling Justice Spite and Revenge, and that which is one of the noblest of Virtues shall be the most odious of Vices.

This Gentleman saith, that to ascribe Anger, Revenge, and such like Passions to God, wou'd be to *make him resemble the weak, womanish, and impotent Part of our Nature, rather than the manly, noble, and generous,* p. 39. But was a just and steady Detestation of Evil and Wickedness ever accounted a Weakness or Imperfection in any Man? Or rather, has not an easy Softness and Indulgence, a giving way to the Movements of Compassion, even where Justice and the Order of things requires that the Offender shou'd be punish'd, has not this been always accounted weak and womanish? A fixed Displeasure against all Vice and Wickedness, which is inseparable from true Virtue and a Love of Goodness, is certainly one of the noblest Characters. This, if any thing, may be call'd manly, noble and generous. Is not this that which the wisest Heathens so much

* P. 34. † P. 33. ‡ P. 36.

much admir'd in *Cato's* Character? And what wou'd they have thought of any Person that shou'd have represented him, on this very account, as weak, womanish, suspicious and revengeful? And what then can we think of a Man that chuses to represent that steady Rectitude, that Love of Justice and Righteousness, which carries the most wise and righteous Governor of the World to manifest his Displeasure against Wickedness by punishing it, under this mean and unworthy Notion?

I must confess it has always seem'd to me one great Excellency of the sacred Writings, that they tend to give Men the most strong and lively Impressions of the Evil and Malignity of Sin, and of God's righteous Displeasure against it, and consequently to inspire them with the utmost Horror of Vice and Wickedness, and with a Dread of the divine Justice, which will certainly pursue them in a terrible manner, if they persist in an obstinate Course of Wickedness. It is proper that, in a Revelation design'd to recover Men from those evil Courses to which they are so strongly addicted, these Things shou'd be represented in the most vigorous and ardent Expressions; no weak, soft, languid Representations wou'd be sufficient; and therefore the Scriptures make use of the strongest Expressions that Language affords, such as those of *Wrath*, and *Fury*, to describe God's great Displeasure against Sin, and Resolution to punish it, and the terrible Effects of his Justice. Such Representations are admirably fitted to awaken presumptuous Sinners out of their stupid Security to a quick and lively Sense of their Guilt and Danger, which is the first Step to a serious Consideration and Amendment. And then the same Scriptures do also make the most amiable Discoveries of his infinite Love and Goodness, and of his rich Grace and Mercy to penitent returning Sinners, to engage and encourage them to
return,

return, and to work upon the more ingenuous Principles and Dispositions of the human Nature. Nor is there any Danger that any that diligently read and consider the Holy Scriptures, shou'd interpret those other Passages as signifying the sudden Emotions of rash Anger or bitter Resentment, such as are to be found in hot and passionate or revengeful Men, since there are many other Passages in the sacred Writings that, by the exalted Notions they give us of the Deity, of his Immutability, Patience, Long-suffering, sufficiently secure us against such Misapprehensions. Do not the same Scriptures represent God as declaring, and that with the greatest Solemnity, that he *delights not in the Death of Sinners, but rather that they should turn and live*, and as using the properest Methods to engage them to return? So that none that govern themselves by the sacred Writings, and carefully compare one Passage with another, and take their Notions from thence, can think that those Expressions of *Wrath* and *Fury* signify a passionate fierce Resentment and Hatred against the Persons of Sinners absolutely consider'd, but a pure and righteous Detestation of Sin and Wickedness, and a steady Resolution to punish it.

And 'tis certain, that if Sinners do not conceive of God as displeased with them when they sin, and do not fear his Displeasure on that account, there is an end of all Religion. And if any Man, under pretence of representing God infinitely happy in himself, should represent him as unconcern'd at the Actions of his Creatures, taking no Complacency in their good Actions, nor displeased with their evil ones, this would be under pretence of doing God honour to destroy his Providence and Government of the World, and to take away the Differences of Good and Evil; and if this was the Representation the Scriptures gave us of this matter, it would be to me an insuperable Objection against them.

But I can't help observing, that this Writer (with whom it is a familiar thing to contradict in one Passage what he advances in another) does himself frequently fall into that manner of Expression which he here finds so much fault with. He often talks of what is pleasing and displeasing to the Deity. Thus he tells us, that "we are to measure what is pleasing and displeasing to God (which takes in the whole of Religion) from what our Reason teaches concerning his Nature, p. 30. p. 66." where he plainly falls into the Notion he endeavours to ridicule, of God's having a Satisfaction or Complacency in the good Actions of his Creatures, and being displeased with their evil ones, and supposes that this may be gather'd from what our Reason teaches us concerning his Nature.

To the same purpose he saith, that "if doing Evil be the only Foundation of God's Displeasure, then ceasing to do Evil must take away that Displeasure; and that as long as Men continue in their Sins, they must continue the proper Objects of God's Resentment, but when they forsake their Sins, they of course become the proper Objects of his Approbation, p. 417, 418 *." Here he plainly supposes that the doing Evil is a just *Foundation for God's Displeasure*; and affirms that as long as Men continue in their Sins, they must continue *the proper Objects of his Resentment*. He ascribes *Displeasure* and *Resentment* to God, and that this Displeasure and Resentment is excited by the Sins of Men.

And p. 280 †. where he endeavours to shew how easily the common People may know the Duties they owe to God, he saith, "they need not much Reflection to know, that the highest Honour and Worship they can render to God is solemnly to own him to be what he is; and that, as they cannot but see, it would be in them affronting God
" to

* P. 378.

† P. 253.

“ to offer him a Worship which they believe he abhors; so they must think the same in others.” Here the Author allows it as a Thing so clear that the meanest of the People can’t be ignorant of it, that there may be a *Worship which God abhors*, and that to offer him such a Worship is to *affront* him. He supposes this to be the Sentiment that common Sense inspires into all Mankind, and which there needs but little Reflection to discern. And are not these Expressions which this Gentleman uses, of God’s being *affronted*, of his *Resentment* of Evil, his *Displeasure*, his *Abhorrence*, as strong and obnoxious as those he finds fault with in the sacred Writings? If this be the Law of Nature, why should the Scriptures be charged as conveying to us Notions contrary to that Law, merely because they describe God’s Resentment against Sin in a strong manner?

There is another Passage I would mention on this Occasion. The Author, when finding fault with our Saviour’s Precept of loving our Enemies, tells us, “ that Actions abstractedly consider’d, are not the “ Objects of Love and Hate, but Persons for the “ sake of their Actions; and that the Actions of “ some Men are too detestable to create in us any “ Sentiment, but of Aversion, so as to oblige us to “ bring them to condign Punishment, p. 342 *.” Here he supposes that it would be quite wrong, and argue an ill Temper of Mind, not to have a Detestation for some Actions and an Aversion for the Persons that commit them, or not to punish them on the account of them. And therefore God, who infinitely exceeds all Men in Righteousness and Purity, must have proportionably a greater Detestation for those Actions, and consequently, by this Author’s way of reasoning, a greater Aversion to the Persons that commit them, and be more strongly inclin’d by the Perfection of his Nature *to bring them to condign Punishment.*

* P. 309.

Punishment. And since in the Passage just now cited this Gentleman supposes it to be evident to the common Reason of Mankind, that there is a Worship which God *abhors*, and that to offer that Worship to him is to *affront* him, or offer an indignity to his glorious Majesty, then if *Actions abstractedly consider'd are not the Objects of Love and Hate*, (as he argues) *but Persons for the sake of their Actions*, those that offer to God this Worship which he abhors, must (according to this Author) themselves be the Objects of his Abhorrence. And now how will this Writer clear himself from holding, that *God hates the Creatures he hath made*, and acts out of *Spite, Wrath, Revenge, or Self-interest?* p. 42 *. Whatever he saith to clear himself from this Charge, will equally justify the Expressions used in the sacred Writings.

As to the Author's Maxim, which is the Title of his 4th Chapter, that "all the Penalties annex'd to the divine Laws are for the Good of Mankind, even of those who suffer for the Breach of them." And again, that "in all the Punishments he inflicts, God must act purely for the Good of his Creatures; and the Effects of his Justice (they never extending to Annihilation) must not only be for the Good of others, but even of the Persons punished," p. 41." It has been already shewn, that though God cannot, in making Creatures or giving them Laws, have in view the adding to his own essential Happiness, or making himself more perfect and happy than he is, yet there is a Justice which he owes to himself (and which his own infinite Perfection and therefore his Happiness requires) to act always wisely and righteously, in a manner agreeable to the just Order and Reason of Things, and to his own glorious Perfections †. And therefore both in making and executing his Laws, he considers not
merely

* P. 36.

† See above, p. 172, 173.

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There is another Passage I would mention on this Occasion. The Author, when finding fault with our Saviour’s Precept of loving our Enemies, tells us, “ that Actions abstractedly consider’d, are not the “ Objects of Love and Hate, but Persons for the “ sake of their Actions; and that the Actions of “ some Men are too detestable to create in us any “ Sentiment, but of Aversion, so as to oblige us to “ bring them to condign Punishment, p. 342 *.” Here he supposes that it would be quite wrong, and argue an ill Temper of Mind, not to have a Detestation for some Actions and an Aversion for the Persons that commit them, or not to punish them on the account of them. And therefore God, who infinitely exceeds all Men in Righteousness and Purity, must have proportionably a greater Detestation for those Actions, and consequently, by this Author’s way of reasoning, a greater Aversion to the Persons that commit them, and be more strongly inclin’d by the Perfection of his Nature *to bring them to condign Punishment.*

* P. 309.

Punishment. And since in the Passage just now cited this Gentleman supposes it to be evident to the common Reason of Mankind, that there is a Worship which God *abhors*, and that to offer that Worship to him is to *affront* him, or offer an indignity to his glorious Majesty, then if *Actions abstractedly consider'd are not the Objects of Love and Hate*, (as he argues) *but Persons for the sake of their Actions*, those that offer to God this Worship which he abhors, must (according to this Author) themselves be the Objects of his Abhorrence. And now how will this Writer clear himself from holding, that *God hates the Creatures he hath made*, and acts out of *Spite, Wrath, Revenge, or Self-interest?* p. 42 *. Whatever he saith to clear himself from this Charge, will equally justify the Expressions used in the sacred Writings.

As to the Author's Maxim, which is the Title of his 4th Chapter, that "all the Penalties annex'd to the divine Laws are for the Good of Mankind, even of those who suffer for the Breach of them." And again, that "in all the Punishments he inflicts, God must act purely for the Good of his Creatures; and the Effects of his Justice (they never extending to Annihilation) must not only be for the Good of others, but even of the Persons punish'd, p. 41." It has been already shewn, that though God cannot, in making Creatures or giving them Laws, have in view the adding to his own essential Happiness, or making himself more perfect and happy than he is, yet there is a Justice which he owes to himself (and which his own infinite Perfection and therefore his Happiness requires) to act always wisely and righteously, in a manner agreeable to the just Order and Reason of Things, and to his own glorious Perfections †. And therefore both in making and executing his Laws, he considers not merely

* P. 36.

† See above, p. 172, 173.

merely what is for the Benefit of his Creatures, but what is most worthy of himself, and most agreeable to his own infinite Righteousness, his Wisdom, his Purity, as well as Goodness; in a word, to the transcendent Excellency of his own most perfect Nature, which is an eternal and indispensable Law to him, which he can no more act contrary unto than he can deny himself. But supposing it to be purely for the Good of his Creatures that he inflicts Punishments, yet still it must be for the general Good; and the Good of particular Persons is no further to be consider'd, than is consistent with the general Good or Good of the Whole. Does not this Writer himself say, in that very Page where he advances the above Maxim, p. 41 *. “ That when the Magistrate punishes a Criminal, 'tis an Act of Justice to the Publick; and when he pardons him, 'tis an Act of Mercy to the Criminal, though an Act of Injustice to the Publick?” Why should he therefore suppose, that in the divine Government Mercy must be shewn to every particular Person that offends? May it not be justly supposed, that in many Cases a shewing mercy to the Sinner may be an Injury to the Publick, inconsistent with the universal Good, to which the private Benefit or Interest of any particular Person or Persons must give way? The only Argument he produces for it is this; “ that God, whose Love infinitely exceeds that of mortal Parents, chastises his Children (and all Mankind are alike his Children) because he loves them, and designs their Amendment, p. 42 †.” But we must not think the Love of God towards his Creatures like Instinct, a weak partial Fondness to them because they are his Productions. He indeed gave them Being, he made them, but then he made them reasonable Creatures, moral Agents, and design'd to deal with them as such, that is, to govern them by Laws,

* P. 35.

† P. 36.

Laws, and to deal with them according to those Laws. It does not follow that because he gave them Being, he must resolve to make them happy at any rate, but in such a Method as is agreeable to the Nature of moral Agents; and to the wise and righteous Methods of his Government. He is their King as well as Father, and Fondness to his Children must not make him do what is unfit and improper for him as the great Governor of the World, and unbecoming his infinite Wisdom and Righteousness. Among Men if it cou'd be suppos'd that a King was the natural Father of all his Subjects, this wou'd not render it the less fit for him to punish them if they violated the Laws. If it were fit for him on such a Supposition (as it undoubtedly wou'd) to make Laws, and to annex Penalties to those Laws, it wou'd be also fit and necessary for him to execute them; and in that Case the punishing in an exemplary manner some rebellious contumacious Children, wou'd be a Kindness to the whole Nation or Family in general; and to refuse to punish them because they were his Children, wou'd be a weak partial Conduct unbecoming a wise and just Governor.

Our Author concludes his 4th Chapter with a Hint against the Eternity of Hell Torments; his Reasons are, because "there can be no Proportion between
"the temporary Injury done to all Men, and eternal Misery of but one Man;" and because "everlasting Torment cannot work Amendment, p. 42 *."
The first goes upon the Supposition, that all Sins are only to be regarded as Injuries done by one Creature to another, and not as Offences against God; a Supposition which has already been shewn to be false and absurd: and what the Malignity and Demerit may be of a reasonable Creature's obstinate persisting in a presumptuous Course of Disobedience to the known Laws of the Creator, in opposition to the supreme

VOL. I. Q Authority,

Authority, and to infinite Goodness, and consequently what Punishment it may be fit and congruous for the righteous Governor of the World to inflict, we are very improper Judges. Sinners may easily be partial in their own Cause, and judge by their own private Benefit, and not by the steady eternal Rules of Righteousness, and by a Regard to the universal Good, what it is that the Wisdom and Justice of the Supreme Being may render it proper for him to do. There are few Penalties but what will be thought too severe, if the Criminal must be the Judge. The Scriptures that tell us, that *the Wicked shall go away into everlasting Punishment*, do also frequently intimate, that the Degrees of Punishment in a future State shall be very various, and that there shall be a vast Difference made between the Punishment of some and of others, according to the different Nature and Aggravations of their Crime.

As to what he adds, that *eternal Torment cannot work Amendment*, this goes upon the Supposition, that Punishment is only design'd for the Benefit and Amendment of the particular Person or Persons that are punish'd, which is a great Mistake, as has been already shewn. But though *eternal Torments* cannot tend to the private Benefit of the particular Persons that are punish'd, yet how does this Gentleman know but the punishing particular Sinners with everlasting Punishment may be for the general Good, or Good of the Whole, and may be what the just Order of Things, and the wise Ends of the divine Government may require? In which Case, out of Compassion to those particular Offenders, to abstain even from their everlasting Punishment wou'd be only a weak partial Tendernefs, unbecoming the wise and righteous Governor of the World. The Threatnings even of everlasting Punishments are plainly for the publick Good. The original Design of these, and of all Threatnings, is not to procure the Misery
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of the Creatures, but to prevent a Breach of the Law, and by deterring Persons from transgressing the Law to prevent their Misery. And as the threatening or denouncing Punishments against obstinate Offenders is what Wisdom and even Goodness or Mercy to the Whole as well as Justice requires, so when they are once threatned, Justice and Truth and rectoral Wisdom, and even a Regard to the publick Order and Welfare, make it necessary that they shou'd be ordinarily executed. For better it were not to threaten those Punishments, than to threaten them and yet never inflict them. We shou'd conceive a very odd Notion of any earthly Government that shou'd take this Method; and to suppose any thing like this in the divine Government, wou'd be to give a strange Idea of the Righteousness and Truth, the Wisdom and Justice of the supreme Legislator.

Supposing reasonable Creatures, that by the original Constitution of their Being, are design'd for an immortal Duration; any thing less than an eternal Punishment wou'd scarce be sufficient to deter them. To threaten obstinate Offenders that are to live for ever only with a temporary Punishment, wou'd be as if in human Governments the highest Punishments denounc'd against the greatest Offenders were only that they shou'd be confin'd for a few Hours, and then be enlarg'd; for any temporary Punishment whatsoever wou'd bear a less Proportion to the eternal Duration of the Sinner, than the Punishment of a few Hours wou'd to the Duration of the longest Life on Earth.

This Gentleman elsewhere puts a Question into the Mouth of the *Indians*, "Why is not the Devil put under Confinement, that he may be prevented from doing mischief? see p. 388 *." He seems to look upon this to be a very reasonable Question.

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Supposing

Supposing therefore that it is the very Law of his Nature, to live for ever, to continue in immortal Being, wou'd not the Reason equally hold, that he shou'd be eternally in Confinement, that is, eternally kept in a State of Punishment, supposing him to continue eternally wicked; and why shou'd it not be equally just with respect to obstinate Sinners of the human Race, that they shou'd be eternally confin'd in a State of Punishment, supposing them to continue eternally wicked? This Author indeed says, that "infinite Wisdom knows how to adjust the Punishment to the Offence, that it may be exactly fitted to produce the desir'd Amendment, p. 42*." But the Question is not, what it is possible for God to do by his absolute Power; he cou'd by his Power have prevented their sinning at all, and have made them absolutely impeccable; but he has not done so; he has thought proper to leave them to the free Exercise of their reasonable Natures; and if he shou'd still leave them to themselves, it is probable that where they are confirm'd in impure and vicious Habits, they will still continue thus wicked, notwithstanding their Punishment; and that the longer they continue, the more hardned they will grow, (Instances of which we may observe daily) except God shou'd interpose in a very extraordinary Manner in their favour, to change the Dispositions of their Minds; and who can pretend to say that God is oblig'd to do this, or that it is wise and fit for him to do so? May it not be proper in this Case to leave them under those Punishments they have by their own wilful Disobedience and Obstinacy brought upon themselves? Perhaps if enlarg'd and freed from the Weight of Punishment, they wou'd only (supposing them confirm'd in Wickedness) make use of their Liberty to seduce others to Sin, and to do all the Mischief in their power. And it may be a Mercy to the Publick

lick (taking in the whole System of rational Beings) to continue them in that State of Punishment.

No body counts it unjust in earthly Governments in many Cases to inflict Penalties that shall last as long as the Lives of the Offenders; nor does it alter the Case, let them live never so long; they may be continued in a State of perpetual Imprisonment, or hard Labour, to the End of their Lives; and if Men liv'd now as long as they did in the antediluvian World, a thousand Years, it wou'd not render such a Punishment unjust; it wou'd still be thought necessary then as much as now to inflict Penalties that shou'd be equal to the Lives of the Offenders, or which they cou'd not expect to outlive: and who then can pretend to affirm that it is unjust in the supreme Governor of the Universe to inflict upon obstinate Offenders a Punishment that shall be commensurate to the Duration of their Beings, how long soever we may suppose them to continue? And tho' those particular Persons thus punish'd were never to be amended by it (which may very reasonably be suppos'd concerning Persons confirm'd in inveterate evil Habits) yet it might be of great Benefit as a Warning and Example to others, as well as a standing Declaration of God's impartial Justice and Righteousness, and the Authority of his Government and Laws, and to convince the whole World what an evil and bitter thing it is for reasonable Creatures to revolt from the Authority and Laws of the Supreme. And as it may be justly suppos'd, that the whole Number of Persons thus punish'd will bear but a small proportion to the intire System of rational Beings, this will no more be a Reflection on the infinite Goodness of God, than it wou'd be upon the Goodness of a wise Government on Earth, to have Jails or Work-houses for Criminals, where they are confin'd during Life, whilst vastly greater Numbers of peaceable and loyal Subjects are flourishing

under the Protection and Influence of that Government, and of wise and equal Laws. And as to let those Criminals hardned in Wickedness out of Confinement in mere Compassion to them, and to suffer them to go abroad again to disturb the Peace and Order of Society, wou'd be an injury to the Publick; so how do we know but that in the greater System, the letting loose obstinate Sinners and freeing them from their Punishment out of mere Pity to them, might be a Detriment to the Peace, the Order, and Welfare of the moral World or universal System, and of the loyal obedient Part of the Creation?

As to the Passage this Author produces from Bishop *Tillotson*, viz. That “ the Right that God
“ hath in his Creatures is founded in the Benefits
“ he hath conferr'd upon them, and the Obliga-
“ tion they are under to him on that account. Now
“ there's none who because he has done a Benefit,
“ can have by virtue of that, a Right to do a greater
“ Evil than the Good he has done amounts to; and
“ I think it next to madness to doubt, whether ex-
“ treme and eternal Misery be not a greater Evil
“ than simple Being is a Good.” This Argument is good to prove, that God, merely by virtue of his Right as Creator, has not a Right to punish *innocent* Creatures everlastingly; but it does not prove that he has not a Right thus to punish guilty Creatures. For he does not punish them merely by virtue of his Right as Creator for his own absolute Will and Pleasure, but he punishes them as he is the righteous Governor of the World. Among Men, tho' the Prince or Magistrate may have conferr'd no particular Benefits on a Person at all, this does not hinder his Right of punishing, if that Person have violated the Laws; nor is it any Injustice, though the Punishment inflicted be greater than any particular Benefit conferr'd by the Magistrate upon that Person. The Justice of the Punishment is to be measur'd by other Rules.

Before I leave this Subject, I shall take some Notice of this Author's Doctrine concerning the Nature of those Rewards and Punishments that God confers or inflicts upon those that observe or transgress his **Laws**, which he seems to think are nothing but the Satisfaction or Remorse that are the natural and necessary Consequences of good or evil Actions. He tells us, p. 25*. that "herein appears the great Wisdom of God, in making Men's Happiness and Misery the necessary and inseparable Consequence of their Actions; and that rational Actions carry with them their own Reward, and irrational their own Punishment. This, I think, can't be denied, as long as there are some Actions naturally beneficial to us, and others as hurtful; and that there's no Virtue, but what has some Good inseparably annex'd to it; and no Vice, but what as necessarily carries with it some Evil: and if our rational Nature is to be the same in the next Life as it is in this, our Actions must produce Effects of the same kind, and that too in a much higher Degree." And again, p. 26†. "Though human Law-givers are forc'd to have recourse to Punishments, which are not connected with the things they forbid; yet a Being of infinite Power is not thus straitned, but may make one the necessary Consequence of the other; and indeed how can it be otherwise, since Good and Evil have their Foundation in the essential Difference of things, and their Nature is fix'd and immoveable: And consequently our Happiness depends on the intrinsic Nature of the one, and our Misery on the intrinsic Nature of the other." Here he seems to me to deny any Rewards but what flow from the intrinsic Nature of Virtue, or any Punishments but what flow from the intrinsic Nature of Vice; and in a word, any

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Rewards

* P. 21. † P. 22.

Rewards or Punishments but what are the natural and necessary Consequences of Men's Actions.

It will easily be allow'd, that a Course of good and virtuous Actions has a natural Tendency to produce an inward Satisfaction of Mind, and the contrary Course Dissatisfaction and Remorse; but to say (as this Author insinuates) that no Reward shall attend the one, nor any Punishment attend the other, but what by a natural and necessary Consequence flows from the Actions themselves, is to betray the Cause of Virtue under pretence of magnifying it, and to give the greatest Encouragement to Vice, under pretence of representing the Misery that inseparably attends it. If Sinners cou'd once be persuaded that God, the righteous Governor of the World, will inflict no Penalty upon them, but what arises from the Reflection of their own Minds, and what is included in the very Nature of the Vice they indulge, I am afraid this wou'd prove for the most part but a small Discouragement. The greatest Agonies that Sinners feel, the Terrors, the Furies, the Remorse of Conscience that haunt the Wicked, and of which many of the Heathens speak in very lively Terms, do principally proceed from a secret Dread of a future Judgment, and of that divine Vengeance that awaits their Crimes; and to take away the Dread of future Punishment, wou'd be the most effectual Way to remove their Agonies of Mind, to allay those Furies that torment them, and to make them easy in their Crimes, which this Author seems very solicitous to do. There are many so perverted, that they even take a pleasure in their Wickedness; and if the Remorse naturally attending their Crimes were all the Punishment they were to endure, then the more they got above that Remorse, (that is, the more obstinate and hardened they were in sinning) the more they wou'd be freed from the Punishment due to their Crimes; so that those who had made
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the least Progress in Vice and Wickedness, wou'd have the largest Share of Punishment. I believe every one will easily own, that if there were no Punishments for obstinate Offenders in this Life, but that Remorse that naturally flows from the Vices themselves which they indulge, and from the Crimes which they commit, this wou'd prove but a small Discouragement; nor cou'd any Government be safe, or the Peace and Order of any Society be long preserv'd, if there were no other Penalties.

But says our Author, " tho' human Law-givers " are forc'd to have Recourse to Punishments which " are not connected" (*viz.* by a natural and necessary Connection) " with the Things they forbid; " yet a Being of infinite Power is not thus straitned, " but may make one the necessary Consequence of " the other." The Question is not, what a Being of infinite Power can do? he cou'd have so order'd it, that by an original Law arising from the very Constitution of our Natures, the Moment any Person sinn'd or indulg'd any Vice he shou'd be invaded with all manner of Pains or Miseries, or shou'd that moment die; in which Case it might have been said that there was a natural Connexion between the one and the other. But he has not done so; nor indeed in this Case wou'd there have been any room for Choice. He has thought proper to deal with us as reasonable Creatures, to be govern'd not merely by present Sense and what we now feel, but by the Hopes or Fears of Rewards and Punishments in a future State. He has not therefore annex'd to the very Performance of good and virtuous Actions such a Reward as makes any other Reward unnecessary, nor has he annex'd to the very Commission of Sin and Vice such a Punishment and Misery as makes any further Punishment needless. For then there wou'd need no other Rewards or Punishments in human Governments no more than the divine, but
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what necessarily flow from the Actions themselves; and the best way wou'd be to leave Men to themselves and to the natural Effects of their own Crimes, without any other Penalties.

Our Author owns "that human Law-givers are
" forc'd to have Recourse to Punishments which
" are not connected with the Things they forbid;"
but why are they *forc'd to have Recourse to* such additional *Punishments*? Is it not because the Remorse and Misery which this Gentleman supposes to be the natural and inseparable Attendant of vicious Actions, is not sufficient to deter Persons from their Crimes without further Penalties?

It is evident therefore that whatever we suppose a Being of infinite Power might do, yet he has not actually annex'd such a Degree of Misery to the very Commission of a vicious Action as renders any further Punishment unnecessary. But indeed after all his Talk of God's appointing those Rewards and Punishments which he supposes to be the inseparable Attendants of virtuous and vicious Actions, I don't see that he leaves God any thing to do in this matter at all. For after having said that a Being of infinite Power may *make the Punishment the necessary Consequence* of the Crime, he adds, " And indeed
" how can it be otherwise, since Good and Evil
" have their Foundation in the essential Difference
" of things, and their Nature is fix'd and immovable; and consequently our Happiness depends on
" the intrinsick Nature of the one, and our Misery
" on the intrinsick Nature of the other?" Where he seems to make the Happiness or Misery of Persons to arise intirely from the Nature of the things themselves, independently on the divine Appointment; so that properly speaking God confers no Rewards, and inflicts no Punishments at all, but leaves Men only and wholly to the natural Effects of their own Actions. And thus under pretence of ascribing
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more to God as a Being of infinite Power than to any earthly Governors, he allows him far less. They may inflict other Punishments and confer other Rewards besides what do naturally and necessarily arise from the Nature of the Actions themselves, but God must not do it. But if it appears from Fact and Experience, that the Misery that naturally attends Vice is not alone sufficient to deter Men from it, but that, besides this, there needs further Penalties, and therefore human Law-givers may inflict other Punishments, why may not God do it as well as they? and why shou'd Men be left merely to the Effects of their own Crimes, and be subject to no other Punishment, in another Life any more than in this?

Let us hear how our Author accounts for it. "In this Life, says he, we can't be perfectly happy, as subject to Diseases and Disasters: we are imperfect ourselves, and have none to converse with but imperfect Creatures, and yet if we act according to the Dictates of right Reason, we shall receive, even here, true inward Comfort and Satisfaction; and hereafter, when we are freed from those Imperfections, eternal Happiness: on the contrary, the Man who abandons his Reason, besides the Misery of all sorts an irrational Conduct will bring on him, must feel in his Mind, Pain and Anguish, even in this Life and in the Life to come, when there are no sensual Things to divert his Thoughts, insupportable Grief and Misery."

This is very true; but the Author here plainly gives up the Cause, and owns Rewards and Punishments, which are not the natural and inseparable Consequence of the Actions themselves, even whilst he endeavours to shew the contrary. He supposes, that good Men in the Life to come shall have a perfect Freedom from *Diseases and Disasters*, and from all the outward Evils and Inconveniences of this present

sent State. And is not this a Reward distinct from their good Actions, and separable in it's Nature from them? It does not necessarily flow from the intrinsic Nature of Virtue, but is an additional Encouragement given by the great Ruler of the World, that if they now apply themselves to the Practice of Righteousness, they shall hereafter be plac'd in a State of Perfection, where they shall be absolutely freed from all those Evils and Inconveniences to which they are now subject. Again, he supposes, that wicked Men in the Life to come shall have *no sensual Things to divert their Thoughts*. Does not this suppose, they shall be plac'd in a State where they shall be depriv'd of those outward Comforts and Enjoyments that now yield them Pleasure; that is, that they shall be in a Place like what the Scripture represents it, miserable and dismal, where no Light or Comfort dwells? For if they shou'd hereafter be plac'd in a World where they shall have the common Advantages and Conveniences they now enjoy, why may they not meet with *sensual Things to divert their Thoughts*, and yield them Entertainment there as well as here? Since therefore he supposes they shall there have *no sensual Things to divert their Thoughts*, he must suppose them plac'd, by the great Ruler of the World, in dark and dismal Abodes, destitute of the Conveniences and Comforts of Life, and of those Things that wou'd entertain and gratify their Senses, like Criminals that are confin'd to a Prison or a Dungeon. And wou'd not this be thought a grievous Punishment? Wou'd this be to leave them merely to themselves and the natural Effects of their own Actions? Or wou'd it not be an additional Punishment, and a great one too, besides the Remorse that necessarily flows from the Nature of the Crimes they commit? And I don't see, but supposing wicked Persons to continue in their Wickedness to Eternity, (which may well be suppos'd, if they

they continue in immortal Being, considering the Strength of their evil Habits) then, by this Author's own Concession, they must be eternally depriv'd of sensual Enjoyments; that is, they must be in an eternal dismal Confinement, and eternally endure *insupportable Grief and Misery*.

And now I have consider'd the Account the Author gives of the Law of Nature, with respect to the main Principles and Sanctions of that Law; or the Scheme of Religion he wou'd introduce; and I think it appears, upon an impartial View, to be prejudicial to the Interests of Natural Religion, which he pretends so highly to magnify and admire.

It tends to weaken Men's Regard to the Deity; and, under pretence of extolling the Goodness of God, does in effect subvert his Authority and Dominion. It makes it, in effect, indifferent whether there be any distinct Regard had to God, or any immediate Worship render'd to him, provided a Man be careful to perform social Duties. It tends to strengthen a selfish Disposition, by instructing Men to measure their Duty wholly by their Interest; that no Man is oblig'd to do any thing, or to obey God himself, in any Instance, any further than he sees it tends, in that very Instance, to his own Interest. It dissolves the sacred Bands of Truth, and tends to make Men look upon Truth and Falshood as only Matters of Convenience.

It gives a great Loose to the Passions, and leaves Men to indulge them without any other Rule or Restraint, than what every Man thinks to be best for himself, in the Circumstances he is at present under. It, in effect, destroys the Sanctions of the Law of Nature, and tends to make Men entertain very slight Thoughts of the Evil and Malignity of Sin, and to free Men from the Dread of divine Punishments, and thereby to remove the most effectual Restraints to Vice and Wickedness. I can't
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help thinking therefore, but that, if this Gentleman's Scheme generally prevail'd, it wou'd have a very bad Influence on the Cause of Virtue, and of natural Religion itself; and instead of being beneficial to Mankind, wou'd tend to their great prejudice, by making the World far wickeder, and consequently more miserable than it is.



C H A P. IX.

That the Author's Scheme is not fitted to answer the Advantages he proposes by it, of delivering Mankind from Superstition and Priestcraft; and that a strict Adherence to the Christian Revelation wou'd have a happier Influence this way.

I Have now consider'd the Author's Scheme in its main Principles, and have shewn that it is far from having a friendly Aspect on the Cause of Virtue and Religion in the World; let us now, that we may the better judge of the Tendency of the Scheme he wou'd introduce, examine a little into the great Advantages he proposes to Mankind by it. The principal Advantage is the delivering Men from the Bondage of Superstition and Priestcraft; let us therefore see whether we need have recourse to this Author to be freed from these Evils, and what an Influence his Scheme has this way.

There is nothing of which this Gentleman gives a more disadvantageous Idea than Superstition; he represents it as worse than Atheism, p. 99, 100*, that it has been and is the great Cause of Immorality, p. 126. and that it has occasion'd those Contentions
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* P. 85, 86.

and Persecutions that have so miserably divided and distracted the World.

This Superstition, he observes, has spread it self over the Face of the whole Earth, and has prevail'd generally in all Times and Places. And he accounts for it thus, p. 169 *. " 'Tis the Observation of
" Naturalists (says he) that there is no Species of
" Creatures but what have some innate Weakness,
" which makes them an easy Prey to other Animals
" that know how to make the Advantage of it :
" now the peculiar Foible of Mankind is Supersti-
" tion, which at all times has made them liable to
" be practis'd on, not by Creatures of different
" Species, but by those of their own ; who, by a
" confident Pretence of knowing more than their
" Neighbours, have first circumvented the Many,
" the Credulous and Unwary, and afterwards
" forc'd the free-thinking Few into an outward
" Compliance."

Here we see he resolves Superstition into an original Weakness of the human Nature, and not merely into an adventitious contracted Infirmary. The Nature of Man was originally form'd with this Weakness attending it ; or in other Words, Man is naturally a superstitious Creature, inclin'd and prone to Superstition, and hence it is, that Men in all Ages have been so easily and generally impos'd on, all but the *free-thinking Few*. That we may judge the better of this, let us consider the Account he gives of the Nature of Superstition ; he makes all Superstition to " consist in entertaining such No-
" tions of God as are unworthy of him, p. 135 †." And again, that it " consists in imagining to pro-
" pitiate an all-wise and gracious Being by such
" Things as have no Worth or Excellency in them ;"
or " in considering him to be so light or passionate,
" as with trivial Things either to be pleas'd, or
" else

“ else mov’d to wrath,” And it is the Title of his 8th Chapter, “ That the not adhering to those “ Notions Reason dictates concerning the Nature of “ God, has been the Occasion of all Superstition.” When therefore he supposes that Men are naturally prone to Superstition, he must suppose that they are naturally prone to swerve from the Notions Reason dictates concerning the Nature of God, prone to entertain wrong Notions of the Deity, and to think to propitiate him by Things of no Value. This Gentleman is certainly very unfit to find fault with those who think that the human Nature is now in a corrupt and degenerate State, but that this is not owing to its original Constitution, since it was created by God in the Beginning, pure and upright, and wou’d have been transmitted so (if it had not been the Fault of our first Parents, the Fountains and Representatives of the human Race) to their Posterity; whereas he himself asserts a Vice, a Weakness, call it what you please, originally cleaving to human Nature; a natural Proneness to Superstition, that is, to the worst of Evils, worse, in his Opinion, than Atheism, and which has subjected the human Race to numberless Mischiefs and Miseries. This he supposes not to be the Effect of a Lapse, but to arise from a Weakness or Defect in Man’s original Constitution; which is really to charge Superstition, and all the Evils and Mischiefs arising from it, upon God himself, the Author of Nature, who form’d Man with this *innate Weakness*, as the Author calls it, and with this wrong original Byass.

He tells us, p. 170, 171 *. that *there are two Ways which never fail to make Superstition prevail, Mysteries and gaudy Shews.* And why can’t these fail to make Superstition prevail? It must be because he supposes the Byass towards Superstition to be naturally

* P. 150.

naturally so strong that it is scarce possible to avoid it. And accordingly he supposes Mankind in all Ages from the Beginning, *Jews, Heathens, Christians*, to have been universally involv'd in Superstition, and thereby subjected to the greatest Calamities, *all but the Free-thinking Few*, as he calls them; that is, those that, like himself, have been for entirely rejecting all Revelation.

And now may not his own Declamation against Dr. *Clark*, whom he falsely charges with supposing that “ God plac'd Mankind without any fault of theirs, in an unavoidable State of Degeneracy and Corruption for 4000 Years together, and continues the greatest Part still in the same State,” be much more justly turn'd upon himself? This Gentleman undoubtedly looks upon Superstition to be the most wretched State the human Nature can be in; and yet he seems to make it, in effect *unavoidable*, at least to the Bulk of Mankind; and this *unavoidable State of Corruption*, he, in effect, ascribes to God himself; that he plac'd Men in it, without any Fault of theirs, from the Beginning of the World to this Day, since he made Men all along from the Beginning with this innate Weakness cleaving to their Natures, and with this original Defect in their Constitutions. And now it may be ask'd, whether God did this [that is, made the human Nature with this original innate Weakness and Defect] “ knowingly or ignorantly, not foreseeing the Consequences? To suppose the first, is to make him act out of Spite and Hatred to his Creatures, in bringing them into Being, and making that Being a Curse to them. Or, if the last, why was not that Defect supply'd as soon as discover'd? p. 399 *.” I return him his own Words, that he may see how he likes them when applied to his own Hypothesis. Indeed nothing can be more unjust than this way

of arguing, when used as this Author uses it, against those that represent the Heathen World as in a State of great Corruption and Degeneracy, which Corruption and Degeneracy they suppose to be owing, not to God, but to themselves, and that he did not cause but permitted it. But I don't see how he can well avoid the Argument, when urg'd against his own Hypothesis, which supposes that God made the human Nature with an original and innate Proneness to Superstition; that he himself subjected it to this Defect and Weakness, or to this wrong Byass, which has been the Source of all those numberless Evils that have infested Mankind. How is this reconcilable with his great Principle, that in framing his Creatures God had nothing in View but their own Good? Was it for the Good of Mankind to create the human Nature in its original Constitution with an unhappy natural Bent to Superstition? Might it not be said upon his Principles, that "this must
 " be the State God design'd they shou'd be in:
 " And it wou'd seem not only to be in vain, but a
 " Crime in them, to endeavour to change that State,
 " in which God, of his infinite Wisdom and Good-
 " ness, thought fit to place them, as he argues,
 " p. 373."

Thus has this Gentleman, who so bitterly inveighs against Superstition on all Occasions, and to this ascribes all the Mischiefs, Immorality, Persecutions that have infested the World, yet made an Apology for it, and by representing it natural and unavoidable, gone a great way to prove it innocent. This Proneness to Superstition is indeed a great Misfortune, but it may help to make us easy, that if it be a Misfortune yet it is no Crime, nor to be charg'd upon us as such. But even this Comfort the Author takes from us by another Part of his Scheme. For he supposes that all Mankind have a clear Light given

given them; a Light which, *like that of the Sun, is universal*, shining to all that do *not shut their Eyes against it*; that Reason dictates to all Men just Notions of Religion; so that it is scarce possible, even for those of the meanest Capacity to be ignorant of their Duty. And now what a miserable Condition must all Mankind be in upon this Gentleman's Hypothesis? All prone to fall into Superstition by an original innate Weakness of their Natures, and yet if they fall into it, chargeable with counteracting the clearest Light! All Men naturally enlighten'd with right Notions of God and of their Duty, and all of them naturally prone to entertain wrong Notions of both! Is not this an admirable Hypothesis (to use the Author's own Words, with a little Variation) which tho' it supposes God has given all Mankind a clear connate Light, yet does also suppose that he has created all Men with a natural Byass to Superstition, which is most directly contrary to that Light, so that alike in all Ages they have been over-run with it, all but a few select Free-thinkers?

But not to urge this any further, let us now consider the Remedies this Gentleman proposes for delivering Mankind from Superstition, that formidable Evil.

There are two Things about which Superstition has been principally conversant; the one is, about the Manner and Rites of divine Worship; the other is, about the Methods of Men's reconciling themselves to God, and propitiating an offended Deity: Let us enquire therefore what our Author proposes on each of these Heads.

With respect to the former, this Gentleman himself owns, that *it is the Voice of Nature that God shou'd be publickly worshipped*, p. 116 *. This is a Principle of Reason that all Mankind have generally agreed in, as also that in this publick Worship of

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God

* P 109,

God some external Rites shou'd be made use of. But then, as to the proper Manner of worshipping the Deity, and the Rites to be made use of in his Worship, here Superstition has had a large Scope. Mankind, in all Ages, have for the most part given into the most absurd and idolatrous Rites; and then have manifested a mighty Zeal for them, as if all Religion consisted in these Things. This, it must be own'd, is a great Evil; but what Remedy does this Gentleman propose? It is that the People be taught to regard no outward Rites at all as of divine Institution; but that it must be left wholly to Men's Discretion to appoint the Manner of divine Worship as they think fit. See several Passages to this purpose cited above p. 67. Where also it is shewn, that this very Remedy which the Author prescribes, the leaving it to Men themselves to determine as they think proper in Matters relating to divine Worship, opens a wide Door to all Superstitions. It is certain, if we must judge by Fact and Experience, that Mankind, in all Ages, have been apt to form a very wrong Judgment in these Things, and when left to themselves and their own Inventions, have fallen into the most absurd Superstitions and Idolatries. Even in the politest Nations, *Greece and Rome*, where this Gentleman tells us *universal Liberty was allow'd*, and where, as he quotes it from Lord Shaftsbury, *Matters were so balanc'd, that Reason had fair Play, and Learning and Science flourish'd*, p. 101 *. yet nothing cou'd be more absurd or unworthy of the Deity than the Rites of their publick Worship. And indeed, supposing, as the Author wou'd have it, that the People were to appoint the Rites of divine Worship, what cou'd be expected from the Majority of the People, who, he tells us, are naturally prone to Superstition, but superstitious Rites? And as the Society, in every Age,

* P. 87.

Age, has an equal Right, upon his Supposition, to appoint what sacred Religious Rites they think proper, it cou'd scarce be avoided but that the number of them wou'd be continually multiplied, 'till Religion was oppress'd and overwhelm'd with their Number and Weight.

But if we shou'd suppose God himself, by an express Revelation, to declare his Will concerning the Rites of his own Worship; to adhere to this wou'd be the best Preservative against the Extravagancies of an otherwise boundless Superstition.

There are two Things which have generally obtain'd amongst Mankind, with relation to divine Worship, when left merely to themselves and their own Discretion; the worshipping God by Images, and the Worship of inferior Deities, or, as this Author calls them, *Mediatory Gods*. The latter of these he unmercifully exposes; that it was owing to the Heathens *debasing God and cloathing him with our Infirmities*, and that if *they had thought at all* they had never fallen into it. But yet it is certain that the *Platonists*, and many of the most refin'd among the Pagan Philosophers, maintain'd the Doctrine of *Genii* or *Demons*, a kind of Middle Beings, by whom our Prayers were to be offer'd to the Supreme. And however good an Opinion this Gentleman seems to have of the Arguments he brings against this Superstition, there is no Likelihood that those Reasons cou'd ever have prevail'd to engage them to discard that way of Worship in general. They might have answer'd to what he offers, that it was not that they suppos'd (as he charges them) the supreme Being to be either *ignorant* or *weak*, or not sufficiently inclin'd of himself to do good to Mankind, but it was only observing a proper Method and Order in worshipping him, becoming such unworthy Creatures in their Addresses to the Supreme, and whereby they testified the just

Sense they had of his infinite Greatness and Purity, and their own Meanness and Vileness. And I don't see that any thing this Author has advanc'd proves the contrary. The Heathen Worship wou'd probably have prevail'd still, if it had not been for the Christian Revelation, which has provided the most effectual Remedy against it, which nothing cou'd do before. All that vast Multitude of Deities whom the Heathens worshipped, their *Gods many* and *Lords many* are now discarded. We are no more distracted with a multiplicity of Mediatory Gods, which fill'd their Religion with Superstition, and produc'd a strange Confusion in their Worship, and a vast Variety of absurd Rites, as offer'd sometimes to one, sometimes to another of those Deities. The Christian Scheme is noble, simple and uniform; that as there is but one God, so there is but one Mediator between God and Man, through whom all our Services are to be offer'd. It supposes a Mediator indeed, which is agreeable to the Sense Men commonly had (how they came by it, I shall not now inquire) of the Propriety of this Method in their Approaches to the Deity, but at the same time it effectually checks a Superstition which was grown to a boundless Extravagance, and by directing us to the One only Mediator of God's own Appointment has rescued us from a Multiplicity of Idol-Gods and Idol-Mediators. It is true that amongst profess'd Christians themselves a Multiplicity of Mediators have been introduc'd, as well as the Worship of Images. But then it is also true, that it was by *biding* from the People the Knowledge of the Scriptures that these Superstitions first obtain'd in the Christian Church, and they are still kept up by the same Methods. And it was by reading the Scriptures that the People at the Reformation discover'd the Absurdity of those Superstitions and idolatrous Rites; and it is by Arguments drawn from Scripture that they are still
most

most unanswerably confuted. And some of the greatest Advocates for those Things, scarce so much as pretend to produce Scripture-proofs, but make use of such Arguments or Excuses drawn from Reason, as the Heathen Philosophers did before them.

I can't see therefore but that if the People were left merely to themselves, and to what might be agreeable to their own Imaginations in divine Worship, without the Guidance of Revelation, they wou'd be much more in danger of falling into the most absurd Superstition, particularly Image-Worship, and the Worship of inferior Deities, than they are now.

Having consider'd Superstition as it relates to the Rites of divine Worship, let us now consider it in another View, as it is conversant about the Methods of Men's reconciling themselves to God, and propitiating an offended Deity. It is an evident Principle of Reason, that God is a just and righteous Being. The Notion of God's Justice is as rational and as deeply founded in Nature as that of his Mercy, and hath as universally obtain'd amongst Mankind. And hence it is, that when Men are conscious to themselves that they are sinful Creatures, this Sense of their Guilt and Dread of his Justice will naturally carry them to do whatever they think properest to avert his Displeasure. To this it is owing, that Men in all Ages have endeavour'd to find out Ways and Means to atone for their Offences. Here Superstition has had a large Scope. It is on this Foundation that Men have *tormented themselves* (as this Author expresses it) *with immoderate Watchings, Fastings, Penances, and Mortifications of all sorts*, not because they thought (as he is pleas'd to represent it) that *God delighted in the Pain and Misery of his Creatures*, but because they were sensible that God is just, and that they had sinned, and therefore thought it proper to express their Sorrow and Re-

morfe for having offended him, and by afflicting themselves before a pure and holy Deity, to shew that they were sensible of their own Demerits. Guilt is naturally a jealous thing; and a guilty Conscience is uneasy and restless, anxious and perplex'd with Terrors; and whilst a Sense of Guilt and Dread of the divine Justice remains, it will be very apt to put Men upon such Expedients as these to avert the divine Displeasure. Hence also proceeded human Sacrifices, which obtain'd (as many learned Men have shewn, particularly *Grotius de Satisfact. Christi, Cap. 10.*) almost amongst all Nations, because they thought, as *Cæsar* represents the Sentiments of the *Gauls*, *pro vita hominum nisi vita hominis reddatur, Deorum immortalium numen non posse placari.*

Now what Remedy does this Author propose to remove those Superstitions that relate to the Methods of propitiating an offended Deity? It seems to be this; that on his own account God is not at all affected whether his Laws be or be not observ'd, nor ever acts out of a Regard to his own Dignity and Authority, nor can ever be suppos'd to want Satisfaction or Reparation of Honour; that he can never be injur'd by our Sins, nor will ever punish Men for the Breach of his Laws as for an Offence committed against himself, distinct from the Harm that by the Breach of them accrues to his Creatures; that therefore they need take no pains to appease the Deity, for he cannot be griev'd or offended with the Sins of us wretched Mortals; nor will he inflict any Penalties upon Sinners, but what flow from the Nature of the Actions themselves.

It must be own'd that these Principles, if generally believ'd, wou'd banish Superstition in this Sense, as it arises from a Sollicitude to appease an offended Deity, but then they wou'd also banish the Fear of God from amongst Men, and by taking away the most powerful Restraints to Vice, wou'd render the
World

World ten-fold more wicked and miserable than it is.

The *Epicureans* valued themselves mightily upon their delivering Men from the Yoke of Superstition and needless Fears; but then it was by denying a God that governs the World, and a Providence that concerns it self with human Affairs: and it must be own'd their Principles had a Tendency to deliver wicked Men from the Terrors they were under, but then they also depriv'd good Men of their best Supports and Comforts, and took away the greatest Encouragements to Virtue as well as Restraints to Vice. However, their Scheme was more consistent than that of this Author, which as he has dress'd it up is inconsistent and unnatural. He owns a God that governs the World, and gives Laws to Mankind, and yet seems to suppose him little affected whether his Laws be observ'd or not. But this is contrary to the common Sense and Reason of Mankind. If God governs the World and gives Laws, it will be hard to persuade Men that he will not vindicate the Authority of those Laws, and out of a Regard to what becomes his own excellent Greatness and Majesty, as well as to the Order and Harmony of the whole moral World, punish the Breach of them. Whilst Men believe that *Justice is eternally inherent in the Divine Nature*; that it is *the natural Law that Evil-doers should be punish'd*; and that God's pardoning Sins is *govern'd by his infinite Wisdom*; that is, that God will pardon Sins no further than his Wisdom sees fit to do so; all which is plainly asserted by this Gentleman, as I have observ'd above, p. 156, &c. This will naturally create many guilty Jealousies and Fears; and these Fears will put them upon many Ways to express their Repentance and Sorrow for their Sins, and to propitiate an offended Deity; and this will open a Door to many Superstitions, and make them liable

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It must be own'd that these Principles, if generally believ'd, wou'd banish Superstition in this Sense, as it arises from a Sollicitude to appease an offended Deity, but then they wou'd also banish the Fear of God from amongst Men, and by taking away the most powerful Restraints to Vice, wou'd render the World

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liable to be practis'd on by cunning and designing Men.

But if we suppose a Revelation from God, assuring Men in his Name of his Readiness to be reconcil'd, and upon what Terms he will pardon their Sins and receive them into Favour; this will be the most likely Way to give Satisfaction to their guilty Minds, and to prevent their running into the Extravagancies of Superstition.

This the Christian Religion hath fully done. It hath discover'd to us an Atonement for Sin; but it is an Atonement of a high and peculiar Nature, appointed by God himself in his infinite Wisdom and Love to Mankind, for declaring his Hatred against Sin, and vindicating the Authority of his Government and Laws.

The Author's Objections against the Doctrine of the Gospel on this Head will come to be consider'd afterwards, when we particularly answer his Exceptions against the Christian Revelation. At present I wou'd only observe, that he that believes this will not seek any further for the Expiation of his Sins, nor lay any Stress on those mean and sorry Expedients which Superstition has invented for this purpose. He will be far from thinking that God can be propitiated with *light and trivial things*, or *things of no Worth*, in which this Author makes the Essence of Superstition to consist. The Custom of offering Sacrifices this Gentleman thinks to be very absurd; and he seems to be much disturb'd at it, because the Priests got *the best Bits* for themselves. However, it can't be denied, that it was a Custom that generally obtain'd amongst all Nations, and that from the eldest Times of Antiquity. It is also evident, that Christianity wherever it has prevail'd has abolish'd that Custom, which nothing cou'd do before. And this one shou'd think ought to recommend it to his Esteem. Indeed it is in the Scriptures alone
that

that we have a just and rational Account of the true Use and Design of Sacrifices (of which I have taken Notice before, p. 55.) and that they are all absolutely superseded by the Death of Christ, who is the Propitiation for our Sins, and not for ours only, but for the Sins of the whole World. It is this that has put an end to those bloody Sacrifices and Expiations, which made a considerable Part of their Worship before. And if it had not been for this, very probably we shou'd have been sacrificing still, and the Priests wou'd still have got the best Bits for themselves, notwithstanding all this Gentleman cou'd offer to the contrary; yea, perhaps we might have been offering up human Sacrifices, as our Heathen Ancestors did; and it may be he wou'd not have found it so easy to disprove that Principle of the *Gauls* mention'd above, that the Sins of Men cou'd only be expiated by human Blood, if they were to argue it merely on the foot of Reason, except he cou'd erase a Sense of the divine Justice and of their own Guilt out of the Minds of Men, which he might have found it very difficult to do.

But the Christian Revelation provides an effectual Remedy against all these Things, by assuring us of a sufficient Atonement, which God accepts as a Propitiation for the Sins of the whole World, and which therefore absolutely supersedes the Necessity of other Expiations. It gives us the highest Assurances of God's Readiness to forgive, and of his being reconcil'd and at peace with us thro' his Son; than which nothing, where it is firmly believ'd, can possibly have a happier Tendency to allay and remove our guilty Jealousies and Fears; and at the same time it every where, in the strongest Manner, insists upon the absolute Necessity of true Righteousness and Obedience; that without this we cannot hope for any Advantage from that Atonement, or any Interest in the divine Favour, or a Right to the future Happiness.

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Our Author observes from Bishop Tillotson, "that
 " the Way that Men are apt to take to pacify God,
 " is by some external Piece of Religion; and that
 " when we apprehend God is displeas'd, we are con-
 " tent to do any thing but learn Righteousness."
 And since there is such a strong Byass this way in
 the human Nature, if we shou'd suppose the Chri-
 stian Revelation discarded, and Men left (as this
 Gentleman wou'd have them) to themselves and to
 their own Discretion, I don't see but the People
 wou'd be in much greater danger of placing Reli-
 gion in things that do not belong to it than they
 are now. He tells us, that the Heathen Priests
 taught the People *that the chief Part of Religion*
consisted in gaudy Shews, pompous Ceremonies, and
such other Tricks as serve to amuse and divert the Vul-
gar; and he makes himself merry with their *Tauro-*
bolia and Lustrations by Blood and Water, p. 128.
 He observes also, that the *Mahometans* make the
Pilgrimage to Mecca the highest Act of Religion, from
which, after many Monkey-tricks, they return clean-
sed from all Impurity; that the *Popish Priests* have
many Arts of reconciling the Practice of Vice with
the Prospects of Heaven, and of pacifying God by
bowing to a Crucifix, by procuring the Intercession of
Saints and Angels, repeating Pater-noster's and Ave-
Mary's, by Pilgrimages, giving Estates to Convents,
and chastising their Bodies for the Sin of their Souls,
 &c. see p. 147, 148, 149. Now 'tis certain that no-
 thing can be a more effectual Remedy against all
 these, than a steady Adherence to the Scripture-Re-
 velation. If Men took their Notions of Religion
 from thence, it wou'd prevent their thinking to
 compound with Heaven for Immoralities, or laying
 a Stress on any outward Rites, as if these wou'd re-
 commend them to God without real Holiness of Heart
 and Life. Our Author himself acknowledges this
 with respect to the New Testament, and produces
 some

some Passages to this purpose, p. 51, 430. And he might have produc'd many Testimonies equally strong out of the Old. And 'tis certain in fact, that the Superstitions he mentions there prevail most where the Scriptures are least read or known; they always abound most in proportion to the People's Ignorance and Unacquaintedness with the sacred Writings. I can't therefore well reconcile it, that at the same time that this Gentleman inveighs so bitterly against Superstition, he is for weakening their Regard to the Holy Scriptures, which have been ever found the best Preservative against it, and is for leaving the People at large to their own Inventions, which have in all Ages been a fruitful Source of Superstition.

Let us now consider the Author's Scheme in another View, as it is design'd to destroy Priestcraft. There is nothing against which he so furiously inveighs throughout his whole Book, and which he seems so much afraid of as Priestcraft. He often complains of the *Authority the Church-Guides have assum'd to themselves, the Powers they have usurp'd over Conscience, &c.* and that *the Impositions of the ambitious domineering Part of the Clergy have produc'd the most fatal Calamities which have befallen the Christian World*, p. 163, 164.*. and therefore he expresses a mighty Concern for the poor *good-natur'd Laity*; and sets up for *defending the Liberty given by God to Mankind*, p. 121†. Now what is the Method this Gentleman proposes for delivering the People from Priestcraft, from Impositions, and Tyranny?

It is in short this, to tell the People, that Religion is of it self so clear and plain, that every Man may easily find it out for himself, even though he can't read in his Mother-Tongue; let him but consult and consider the Nature and Reason of things, and compare the Ideas of God and the divine Attributes with his
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* P. 144. † P. 106.

own Nature, and consider and compare the several Relations he sustains towards God and towards his Fellow-Creatures, and what tends to his own *Happiness*, his *Health*, his *Reason*, and the *Pleasure of his Senses*; taken and compar'd together; and he will soon come to know the whole of his Duty, he will know what God expects and requires of him, and what he is to expect from God.

But is not this to put the People upon a Work for which the generality of Mankind are evidently incompetent? This Author sends every Man to the Light of Nature, and his own Reason. And what if his own Reason and Experience lets him see his Ignorance and Need of Assistance? And the better Understanding he has, and the more Modesty, the more sensible he will be of this. What if he finds that he cannot of himself come to a Certainty or Assurance in several Things that are of considerable Importance to him to know? What must he do in this Case? It is natural for him to apply to those, who he thinks have more Leisure or a better Judgment, or who have consider'd these Things better than himself. And here there may be room for Priestcraft, according to our Author; since he tells us, that "Men are easily circumvented by those
 " that pretend to be more knowing than they, and
 " that most of the prevailing Superstitions have been
 " erected on this Foundation, and to this owe their
 " whole Support, p. 169*." Now how is this to be prevented? Must every Man think that he knows already as much as any Man can teach him? That is, that there is no Man in the World more wise and knowing than himself? And what is this, but to encourage a pert conceited Ignorance, and effectually bar the way against all further Inquiries, and consequently all Progress in Knowledge; the consequence of which would be universal Barbarism and Ignorance;

rance; and this very Ignorance wou'd make way for Priestcraft, and subject Men to be impos'd on by others more cunning than themselves.

It has been the common Voice and Consent of all Nations, as to have outward Rites of publick Worship, so to have some Persons amongst them whose more peculiar Office and Employment it is to administer those Rites, and to whom the Care and Management of things sacred is committed. Nor does our Author himself seem intirely to condemn this, but he wou'd have the Society to appoint the Persons, as well as Time and Place of divine Worship, p. 116*. Be it so, let the People chuse them; yet their very Office of presiding in the Ceremonies of Religion wou'd soon procure them an Authority and a kind of Sacredness; and if they happen'd to be cunning Men, and hit upon the Methods, which this Author says never fail to make Superstition prevail, *Mysteries* and *gaudy Shews*, I don't see how upon his own Hypothesis, Priestcraft cou'd be prevented; this wou'd soon give them a mighty Influence over the Minds of the People, so that they wou'd have it in their power to impose upon them what they pleas'd.

But supposing a plain Revelation given as a standing Rule which the People are to read and consider for themselves, here they have a Rule to go by, by which they may examine the Doctrine of their Teachers; and which, if attended to, will prevent their being impos'd on in things of moment, so that they will be much safer against the Impositions of Priests and false Guides, than if left merely to themselves without such a Revelation.

Any one that impartially considers the Idea the Gospel gives us of the Christian Ministry, cannot but be sensible that if this had been pursued and adher'd to, instead of being a Prejudice, it wou'd have been a great Advantage to Mankind. And this Author

* P. 100.

himself owns, that whilst the Method made use of in the Apostolical Days was observ'd, *no Inconveniences happen'd, and it was not till after this was broken through that the Christian World was enslav'd, and Religion forc'd to give way to destructive Superstition*, p. 109*. Is not this plainly to own, that the Christian Discipline and Ministry, if it had continued on the foot and in the Simplicity in which the Apostles left it, wou'd have produc'd none of the Inconveniences he so much complains of? And if this be his Sentiment, why does he not instead of attempting to destroy the Authority of the Gospel, endeavour to reclaim Men to the original Purity and Simplicity of the Christian Worship and Discipline? He frequently complains of the great Mischiefs done to the World by the extravagant Powers which the Christian Priests have assum'd to themselves; but it is very disingenuous in him to turn this to the disadvantage of Christianity it self, because he himself believes and has taken pains to prove that there is no Foundation for these Powers in the New Testament.

But says he, “ if they who maintain these and
 “ other as vile Maxims, have got possession of Men’s
 “ Minds, by ingrossing the teaching the young as
 “ well as instructing the old, what less than a new
 “ Revelation can expose their Expositions, or ex-
 “ plain away their Explanations of the present Re-
 “ velation, which have prov’d more fatal to the
 “ Happiness of Mankind, than all the Superstitions
 “ of the Pagan World? p. 406, 407†.”

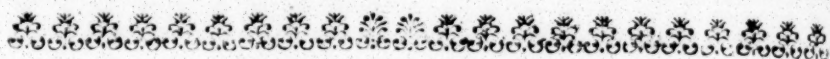
But it is easy to answer, there needs no new Revelation to expose their Expositions, there needs only a recourse to the old, which is sufficiently plain and clear. Nothing is more evident than that the Gospel no where gives the Priests a Domination over the Consciences of Men, nor exempts them from a
 Subjection

* P. 94.

† P. 368.

Subjection to the Civil Powers. It every where asserts the Liberty of the People to judge for themselves, to search the Scriptures, to try all things, try the Spirits, &c. The Texts on which the Church of *Rome* has pretended to found its exorbitant Claims, have scarce so much as the Appearance of Probability; nor cou'd he easily suppose any other Revelation that cou'd have less in it to countenance them than the present. Accordingly is it not from the Holy Scriptures, that those very exorbitant Claims have been most successfully combated and expos'd? And did not those Powers rise to their greatest Height, in a Time when the Laity were kept in Ignorance of the Scriptures? And it is manifest from Fact and Experience, that the better the People are acquainted with the sacred Writings, and the more diligently they read and consider them, the more effectually are they secur'd against human Authority and Impositions in Matters of Religion. They will indeed have a just regard for their Pastors, and esteem them highly in Love for their Work's sake, but they will not be apt to resign themselves blindly to their Dictates, and become Slaves to their usurped Claims. This the Guides of the *Romish* Church, who understand their Interest very well, are sensible of; and therefore in order to keep the Laity in a blind Subjection to their own Authority, see it necessary to withhold the Scriptures from them. Our Author labours the same Point; and at the same time that he so bitterly inveighs against Superstition and the Tyranny of the Clergy, his real Design is to destroy the Authority of divine Revelation, and consequently to take the Bible out of the hands of the People. This is an odd Proof of his Concern for the *good-natur'd Laity*, and Zeal for their Liberties, and against Priestcraft and Tyranny, to deprive them of that which is the best Security for their Liberties, and the best Defence against Imposition and Tyranny.

And I am persuaded that, whatever his Design may be, the Effect of taking the Scriptures from the People, and leaving them wholly to themselves, wou'd be this, that they wou'd soon fall into universal Darknes and Ignorance, and this Ignorance wou'd make way for Imposture and Priestcraft, and expose them an easy Prey to ambitious and aspiring Men.



C H A P. X.

An Examination of those Passages in which the Author pretends to describe the Religion of a Deist, and to draw a Parallel between that and Christianity; with some further Proofs that his Scheme is inconsistent with it self, and prejudicial to the Interests of Virtue, and to the Good of Mankind.

IN order to have a fuller View of the Author's Design, it will not be improper to examine those Passages in which he particularly attempts to describe the Religion of the Deist, and shew the Advantages he has above the Christian. There are no Passages in his Book wrought up with greater Art than these, or more likely to impose upon the unwary Reader.

The first which I shall take notice of is in p. 76*.
 “ I shall not scruple to affirm (says he) that he
 “ who strictly adheres to what the Light of Nature
 “ teaches him concerning the divine Goodness, as
 “ he will avoid the comfortless Prospect of the Atheist,
 “ the perpetual Anxiety of the Superstitious,
 “ the wild Perturbation of the Enthusiast, and the
 “ pernicious

* P. 65.

“ pernicious Fury of the Bigot, so he can’t fail of
“ true Religion happily seated in the middle between
“ these Extremes; and as such a Person can’t but
“ love God as he ought; so in Imitation of the di-
“ vine Goodness he will contribute his utmost to the
“ Good of others, and his Love and Kindness will
“ be as extensive as human Nature.” And then he
asks, “ What can be wanting to a Man who has
“ this heavenly, this godlike Disposition, which
“ renders him happy in himself, and as far as it is
“ in his power makes the World so too?” He
adds; that “ Men can never have true Sentiments
“ of the true Goodness of the divine Legislator,
“ or esteem his Laws as they ought, till they are con-
“ vinc’d he requires nothing of them but what is
“ for their Good;” and that “ these Notions early
“ inculcated will cause Men with joy to obey the di-
“ vine Laws, and make them in reality love God,
“ as well as be beloved of him, who above all things
“ requires the Purity of the Mind, and that Men
“ shou’d act not out of a Principle of slavish Fear,
“ but from perfect Love void of all Fear.”

He designs this for a Description of the Religion
of the Deist, but it much better fits the Christian.
If such a Disposition as he describes be *heavenly* and
godlike, must we not have a high Esteem for Christi-
anity, which every-where requires it, and has the
happiest Tendency to promote it? Nothing can have
a greater Influence to form us to an extensive Bene-
volence, or can raise in us higher Notions of the di-
vine Love and Goodness than the Gospel, which is
indeed little else than the glad Tidings of his rich
Grace and Mercy to our perishing Natures, and a
Discovery of the Methods of his infinite Wisdom
and Love for our Salvation and Happiness. Every
true Christian has the highest Assurance, that what
God requires is generally for the present, and al-
ways

ways ultimately and in the final Issue, for our own greatest Good and Happiness.

There is nothing dreadful or melancholy in the Gospel-Scheme, except to the Wicked and those that resolve to persist in an impenitent Course, whom it is useful to fill with Terror; but to the Good, the Penitent, and Sincere; all is joyous and serene; the most happy Promises are made, the most glorious Privileges are provided; God hath sent his Son to redeem them from Death and Ruin, through whom they have the Remission of all their Sins; they are taught to regard God himself as reconcil'd, and as adopting them into his Family; his Son as their Head, their Saviour, and Advocate; his Spirit as their Sanctifier, their Comforter, and their Guide; to enlighten, purify, and assist them in their Duty; his Angels minister to them, and all things work together for their Good; they have Comfort in all their Tribulation, and Support in every Circumstance; there is a happy World before them, a State of eternal Joy and Felicity, where God himself shall be their glorious everlasting Portion.

Hence true Christians are often call'd, and it is urg'd upon them as their Duty, *to rejoice in the Lord*, Phil. 4. 4. 1 Theff. 5. 16. *These things write we unto you*, says the Apostle, *that your Joy may be full*, 1 John 1. 4. Those that really believe all this, must needs feel in their Hearts the most warm and lively Sentiments of Love and Gratitude, and the powerful and happy Constraints of divine Love, removing all their guilty Jealousies and Fears, and drawing their Hearts to God, whom they cannot but regard as all Love and Goodness, a most wise, and pure, and just Goodness, in conjunction with infinite Wisdom and Righteousness. The Scheme of the Deist compar'd with this, is dark and comfortless. It discards the comfortable Hopes and Promises of the Gospel, and instead of the ex-
prels

press and glorious Assurances of the Forgiveness of Sins and eternal Life that are there given us, leaves Men to their own feeble Conjectures, and to gather these things as well as they can from the Reason and Nature of things. It leaves Men at a great Uncertainty in many Instances as to the Duties requir'd of them, and at a still greater as to the Way and Terms upon which God is willing to pardon guilty Creatures, and restore them to Favour. It gives them at best only some general Hopes of the divine Mercy; and if they think at all, they must be sensible that this shall be no further exercis'd than is consistent with the Justice and the Wisdom of God, and the Good of the Whole, which are things the Reasons and Measures of which are in a great measure unknown to us. And is it happier to be left to such Jealousies and Uncertainties as these, than to have the Advantage of an express Revelation from God himself?

What has been now offer'd may help us to judge of another Passage in this Author, where speaking of himself and his Friends, he saith, " they are in
" a better State than Christians, even as to tempo-
" ral Happiness. Since they must delight in their
" Duty, as having nothing requir'd of them, but
" what they most evidently see tends to their Good;
" and consequently are free (no small Happiness)
" from all pannick Fears; whilst they who believe
" there are things merely positive in Religion, of
" which Reason affords no Light how they are to
" be perform'd, or even what they are, must lie
" under endless Doubts and Fears, and according to
" the Measure of Superstition, be wrought upon by
" designing Men, to hate, damn, and persecute one
" another about such Observances; as we see is ac-
" tually done every where by the different Sects;
" who are so absurd, as to believe God can give his
" Creatures arbitrary (by which he means positive)
" Commands, p. 125, 126*.

* P. 109, 110.

Who has the truest Foundation for solid Comfort and Satisfaction in this Life, the Deist or the Christian, has been already shewn. Nor can I conceive upon what Ground the Deist can pretend to be exempt *from all pannick Fears*, except by supposing, which is this Author's comfortable Scheme, that God is not concern'd whether his Creatures observe his Laws or not. But if there be Reason to think that God will punish Sin, and vindicate the Authority of his Government and Laws, the Deist cannot be exempt from Fears, and has far less to support him against them than the Christian.

Indeed I cannot see wherein the Happiness of the Deist does consist, which this Writer so gloriously represents. Is it that he is govern'd by the Nature and Reason of Things? That is, in other Words, he is left to find out his Duty as well as he can, merely by his own Reason, and therefore is happier than he that has besides this an express Revelation from God himself to guide and to assist him. But he is not troubled with useless Speculations: that is, he does not believe a Saviour, that God has sent his Son to redeem us, or that he has given any express Promises of the Remission of Sins, and eternal Life; Things, which where they are really believ'd, are a perpetual Source of Joy to good Men. But he is free from the Yoke of *Arbitrary Commands*, by which he means positive Institutions: and what are these? Baptism and the Lord's Supper, and the publick Worship of the Lord's-day. Mighty Advantage! And what Christian that considers these things aright, does not think it his Privilege to observe them? But whilst this Gentleman thinks it such a Hardship to be oblig'd to observe positive Rites in Religion of God's own Appointment, he is for giving the Power into the hands of the respective States and Communities, to lay what Injunctions they think proper in religious Matters; as if it were a greater Privilege

to have things of this Nature left to the Invention and Imagination of Men, who are subject to Humour and Caprice, and who, this Author himself tells us, have a kind of natural Bent and Byass to Superstition, than to have them appointed by God himself, who we are sure will appoint nothing as a Means but what he knows to be well suited to obtain the End propos'd, and who will take care in every thing he institutes, to do what is, all Circumstances consider'd, for his own Glory and for our Benefit. But Christians *persecute one another for such Observances.* And is there any thing in the Christian Revelation to countenance such Persecutions? If not, why shou'd this be turn'd to its Disadvantage? Human Impositions in Matters of Religion and Persecution have gone hand in hand; and if any one examine the History of the Church in all Ages, he will find that Persecutions have been chiefly rais'd not for things appointed by God, but for things that had their Original from human Invention; and that the Mischiefs the Author complains of, wou'd have been avoided, if Men had kept to the Simplicity of the Christian Doctrine and Worship as laid down in the sacred Writings.

P. 364*, &c. after having produc'd a long Quotation from Doctor *Clark*, containing an Abstract of natural Religion, relating to the Acknowledgment of the Being of a God and his glorious Attributes, his creating the World by his Power and Wisdom, and his continual preserving and governing all things by his Providence, the Obligations we are under to adore and worship him, to praise him, and pray to him; to abstain from all Debaucheries, and exercise an exact Government of our Passions, &c. and that there shall be a future State of Rewards and Punishments in the Life to come: Our Author calls this the *Deists Creed*, and says, *the Deists will own, no doubt, that the Doctor*

has done them Justice. But the Doctor is far from supposing, that the Deists generally maintain that Scheme of Principles which he there lays down; on the contrary, he says, “there is too much Reason to believe, that there are very few such Deists as these, among modern Deniers of Revelation.”

But let us hear our Author, “all their (the Deists) Principles, as the Doctor represents them, have a direct Tendency to make them good Men, and contain nothing to divert them from intirely attending to all the Duties of Morality in which the whole of their Religion consists, and which leaves them no room for those endless Quarrels and fatal Divisions which Zeal for other things has occasion’d among their Fellow-Creatures, and whom they pity upon the account of that insupportable Bondage which Superstition has in most Places laid them under. And must not a Religion which the Doctor has prov’d to be demonstrably founded on the eternal Reason of Things, have a more powerful Influence on rational Beings, than if it was laid on any other Bottom? How can a Religion, which, as the Doctor has describ’d it, carries in all its Parts such evident Marks of Wisdom and Goodness, fail to make Men in love with their Duty, when they must plainly see that and their Interest to be inseparable? If Princes requir’d no more of their Subjects, and private Men of their Neighbours, than to be govern’d by these Principles, how happy wou’d the World be thus govern’d? p. 366.”

A glorious Panegyrick this, which the Author here makes upon the Deists and their Religion! But if none must be counted true Deists but those that maintain all those Principles, I am afraid there will be found very few true Deists among those who glory in this Character; and I can’t help suspecting, from several Passages in his Book, that this is far from being

ing a just Account of the Author's own Creed. It is certain that there was scarce any one of these Principles that was not denied or contested by some one or other Sect of Philosophers in the Pagan World; and those of 'em that went furthest, often talk'd of many of these things with great Uncertainty. But let us make the most favourable Supposition, that the present Deists generally maintain those Principles, yet still it must be own'd, that those that believe the Scriptures have a greater Certainty as to these very Principles than the Deists can pretend to have; for they have all the Evidence for them from Reason and Nature that the Deists have; and besides this, they have an express Revelation from God himself, confirm'd by the most illustrious Attestations, assuring them that these things are so. If therefore these Principles are so excellent as the Author represents them, and produce so good an Effect, then the Christian Revelation ought to be highly valued, and cannot but be signally useful and beneficial to Mankind, since it makes the clearest Discovery and gives the strongest Confirmation of those very Principles; so that though some of the most important of them were contested before, and either openly denied, or regarded as Matters of doubtful Disputation, amongst those that pretended to follow Reason and the clear Light of Nature, wherever Christianity is believ'd these Principles are universally acknowledg'd; which shews that after all the Obscurity this Gentleman complains of in Scripture, it is admirably clear and plain, in those Points that are confessedly of the highest Importance to Mankind. Those things which it cost the Philosophers so much Pains and Study to find out, (and after all they were uncertain and divided about them) are there deliver'd with such Plainness and Clearness, and set in so strong a Light, as to be made obvious to the Vulgar and Illiterate.

This

This Writer mentions it as a great Advantage of the Deist's Principles, that they *contain nothing to divert Men from attending to all the Duties of Morality, in which the Whole of their Religion consists, and which leave no room for those endless Quarrels and fatal Divisions, &c.* But if we must judge of the Goodness of Principles and of a Religion, by its Tendency to promote Morality in its just and noble Extent, as including the Duties we owe to God, our Neighbours, and our selves, then certainly we ought to have the highest Regard for the Christian Revelation, which both every-where exhibits the most pure and refin'd Morality, and furnishes the most powerful Motives and Arguments to ingage Men to the Practice of it. *It contains nothing to divert Men from attending to all the Duties of Morality.* It every-where inculcates in the strongest Manner, the absolute Necessity of universal Holiness; not merely of an outward Reformation, but of an inward Purity of Soul, and that nothing else will do instead of a real substantial Piety and Righteousness. All things there have a direct Tendency to Practice; its Doctrines, both those of natural Religion, which it confirms and sets in the strongest Light, and its more peculiar Doctrines (which this Gentleman thinks fit frequently to represent as *useless Speculations*) are design'd not merely to amuse and entertain, but to kindle good Affections in the Soul, to raise in us the highest Love to God, and Admiration of his sovereign Grace and Mercy, together with the profoundest Reverence of his Justice and Righteousness; which are the Dispositions that best become reasonable Creatures towards God. And even the positive Rites it enjoins, which are few and simple, instead of diverting Men from Morality, are design'd to bind them more strongly to it, and to bring them under the most express and solemn Engagements to live to God in a Life of Righteousness and Purity, in
Obedience

Obedience to the Laws, and in Imitation of the Example of the Redeemer. The Heathens themselves were sensible that this was one great Design of the Christian Rites, as appears from the famous Testimony of *Pliny*, who shews far more Candor in judging of Christianity than our Author.

If there have been endless Quarrels and fatal Divisions occasion'd by Zeal for other Things, &c. this is not chargeable on Christianity, which, by the Author's own Acknowledgment, tends to take Men off from laying too great a Stress on mere outward Observances, and every where condemns a bitter Zeal about these Things. Controversies about *Words*, and that *minister Strife rather than godly edifying*, are there forbidden; universal Charity and brotherly Love and mutual Forbearance are there recommended in the strongest manner; which if observ'd, cou'd not but have the happiest Effect, and wou'd destroy the Seeds of Animosities, and promote universal Benevolence and Peace amongst Mankind. But cou'd these Gentlemen accomplish their Design of abolishing the Christian Religion, wou'd there be no Quarrels or Divisions! The Contentions wou'd then be not about the mere Appendages, but the main Foundations of all Religion; about a Providence, about a State of future Rewards and Punishments, about the Immortality of the Soul, about the Differences of Good and Evil, about Man's Free-Agency, &c. many of which have been denied or controverted both by Philosophers of old, and by some of our Author's own Friends of late embarked in the same glorious Design with himself. And as to what he thinks trifling Debates, does not he himself say, "that there are Things which have
" no Worth in themselves, yet, because those that
" have can't many times be perform'd without
" them, these are to be consider'd as Means to an
" End?" and these he wou'd have "left to human
" Discretion,

“ Discretion, to be varied as best suits those Ends
 “ for whose sake alone they were instituted, p. 431 *.”
 And might not Men, if left merely to themselves
 and their own Discretion in such Matters, differ
 about these Things, and the Fitness of these Means,
 and might not this produce Quarrels and Conten-
 tions? Might not some think those to be fit Means
 which others thought the contrary, and might they
 not be for imposing their own Sentiments and their
 own Observances (of which Men usually have a
 very good Opinion) on others? There were Con-
 tentions about Things that had nothing to do with
 true Religion before Christianity appear’d, and wou’d
 be though it were abolish’d. And if there were
 not much Blood shed in the Heathen World about
 such Matters, it was because their great Men and
 Philosophers universally complied with the Religion
 of their Country, and the establish’d Rites, how-
 ever absurd and contrary to Reason, and to the Ho-
 nour of God; and when these Superstitions and Ido-
 latries were openly attack’d by the Christians, it
 soon appear’d that the Zeal which the Heathens had
 for these Things carried them to the Extremes of
 bloody Rage and Violence. The best Way to free
 Mankind from trifling Debates, and from a too
 great Regard to idle Superstitions and useless Obser-
 vances, wou’d not be to cast away the Christian Re-
 velation, in which Case they wou’d probably be far
 more expos’d to them than now, but to adhere strictly
 to the Simplicity and Purity of Religion as laid down
 in the Gospel.

It is a plausible Pretence to *make Religion consist
 wholly in Morality*, as this Gentleman tells us the
 Deists do. But if it appears, upon Examination,
 that it is only a defective Morality which they wou’d
 introduce; a Morality which, under pretence of ad-
 vancing social Virtue, has little regard to that Part
 of

of Religion which consists in the Duties we more immediately owe to God ; if it be a Morality like this Author's, mean and selfish, which carries Men to terminate all their Views in themselves, and to measure every thing by their own narrow Interests ; if it be a Morality which can allow Men to lye and to deceive, when they think it for their Convenience to do so, and which leaves them at large to indulge their Appetites and Passions, their Lust and Revenge, in Instances where the Gospel-Law restrains them ; if under pretence of reducing Religion to Morality alone, they are for discarding those Doctrines and Principles, which have the noblest Influence on Morality, and furnish the most powerful Motives and Encouragements to it ; it becomes us to be upon our Guard against such specious Pretenders.

The *Epicureans* wou'd make as plausible an Harangue, to shew the Advantages of their Scheme, as the Author has done for his. They declar'd for Morality and Virtue alone, and were for rejecting all uselefs Speculations ; but then the most important Principles of natural Religion pass'd with them for uselefs Speculations. It was a uselefs Speculation to believe that God created the World, or that he governs it by his Providence, or to believe the Immortality of the Soul and a future State. They, like this Author, pitied the rest of Mankind groaning under the insupportable Yoke of Superstition ; and undertook the glorious Work of delivering Men from their Bondage, by freeing them from the Fear of God, the Apprehensions of a Providence, and a future Judgment ; for they thought that whilst these Opinions prevail'd, it was impossible to get rid of the Terrors of Superstition. They therefore set up for the greatest Benefactors to Mankind. And every one knows how gloriously *Lucretius* speaks of the Obligations the World was under to *Epicurus* on that account. Our Author therefore may go on to
cry

cry up the Advantages of his Scheme, but certainly none but very unthinking People will be impos'd on by such Pretences, which it is easy for any Man to make; that has but Confidence enough to do so.

But, says he, " must not a Religion which the
" Doctor has prov'd to be demonstrably founded on
" the eternal Reason of Things, have a more power-
" ful Influence on rational Beings, than if it was
" laid on any other Bottom?" But I ask; must
not a Religion which gives a clear and plain Revelation, confirm'd by the Authority of God himself, of the great Principles that lie at the Foundation of Morality; so as to render them obvious to every Capacity, be preferable to that which leaves the Vulgar to gather these Things as well as they can, every Man for himself, by considering and comparing the Natures and Relations of Things, and by abstracted Reasonings, for which they have evidently little Leisure or Capacity, or else leaves them to the Disputes and Wranglings of the Philosophers? Must not a Religion, which not only supposes the Duties of Morality to be founded in Nature and Reason, but to be expressly required and commanded by God himself, and enforc'd by the most glorious Promises of eternal Rewards, in case of Obedience, and by the Threatnings of eternal Punishments, in case of a presumptuous impenitent Course of Disobedience, have a greater and more powerful Influence than that which strips them of those Sanctions, or at least greatly weakens the Belief of them? Must not a Religion, which gives Sinners the most express Assurances in the Name of God, of Pardon and Acceptance upon their sincere Repentance, give greater Encouragements to Repentance, and have a greater Influence to comfort the truly Penitent, than that which leaves them in this matter only to their own Conjectures, and to some general Hopes of the divine Mercy; which, in a Soul conscious to itself
that

that it has, in many Instances, offended and transgress'd the divine Law, may be easily over-rul'd by the Jealousies and Suspicions of a guilty Mind, and the Apprehensions of divine Justice?

Again, he asks, "How can a Religion, which, as the Doctor describes it, carries in all its Parts such evident Marks of Wisdom and Goodness, fail to make Men in love with their Duty, when they must plainly see that and their Interest to be inseparable?" This Description suits admirably well to the Christian Religion, which makes such amiable Displays of the divine Grace and Mercy towards Mankind, as cannot but cause our Hearts to flow forth towards him in Love and Gratitude; which represents our Duty in the clearest manner, and provides for us the most effectual Assurances, and gives us the greatest Encouragements to the Performance of it; which makes such engaging Representations of the glorious Privileges, that good Men are or shall be invested with, and contains such *exceeding great and precious* Promises in the Name of God himself, as where they are really believed, cannot but convince us that our Interest and Duty are inseparable.

He concludes, "If Princes requir'd no more of their Subjects, and private Men of their Neighbours, than to be govern'd by these Principles, how happy wou'd the World be thus govern'd!" That is, in other Words, if Deism were establish'd, what a happy World would it be! But if Mankind be so corrupt and deprav'd, that they not only break through the Restraints of natural Religion, (which Christianity does not enervate, but leaves in their full Force) but besides this, break through all the additional Engagements to Virtue and Restraints to Vice, which the Christian Religion furnishes, what wou'd they do if these Engagements and Restraints were laid aside? Is there not Reason to think, that
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on such a Supposition the World wou'd be far more wicked and dissolute, and consequently more miserable than it is? The Author here seems willing to allow, that *Princes shou'd require of their Subjects, and private Men of their Neighbours*, to believe and profess the *Principles* contain'd in what he calls the *Deists Creed*. This puts me in mind of a Proposal made, not long since, by a Friend of the Author's, that "nothing but the Law of Nature, the Observance whereof is absolutely necessary to Society, and what can be built thereon, shou'd be inforc'd by the Sanctions of the Civil Magistrate; which Law will then be best understood, best establish'd, and best executed, when it is not propos'd to establish any thing else, or to punish Men for the Breach of any thing else. This Proposal lays the fewest Restraints upon Liberty, and best supports Liberty without encouraging Licentiousness." See *Scheme of Literal Prophecy*, p. 432, 433. But I believe the Gentlemen that take upon them the Character of Deists, wou'd not easily agree among themselves, what is that *Law of Nature*, and what those *Principles built thereon* which they wou'd have to be inforc'd by the Sanctions of the Civil Magistrate, and for the Breach of which Men shou'd be punish'd. And I am afraid if it were requir'd of them to believe and profess all that is contain'd in what he calls the *Deists Creed*, many wou'd cry out of Imposition as much as they do now, and think it as great a Hardship to be oblig'd to this, as to be oblig'd to believe and profess the Bible. And I very much question whether this Author himself cou'd subscribe all those Articles, except on the Principle he advances, that it is lawful to deceive those that wou'd impose Opinions upon others, in which the State is not concern'd, as probably he wou'd think it is not in some of these.

And now having consider'd the advantageous Representation this Gentleman has here made of the Deists and their Principles, I think I have a Right, in my Turn, to propose some Questions as well as he. Shall we discard a Religion which contains the most admirable System of pure refin'd Morality, and that in plain Propositions obvious to the Vulgar, directing them in every Part of their Duty; which gives the noblest Ideas of God and of a Providence, and of a State of future Retributions; which makes the most glorious Discoveries of the divine Grace and Mercy, and thus lays a Foundation for the most solid Joys to the Upright and Sincere; and yet at the same time makes the most awful Displays of his righteous Vengeance against the Presumptuous and obstinately Disobedient; which recalls Men from those Idolatries and Superstitions in which they were universally involv'd, to the pure Adoration of the one living and true God; which strengthens natural Obligations with all the Inforcements of a divine Authority, and of positive express Promises and Threatnings; which it is evident always had and always will have a mighty Influence on Mankind? Shall we not, if we love the Cause of Virtue and Goodness, love such a Religion as this? And what can we think of those that labour with so much Zeal and Industry to destroy its divine Authority, to rob good Men of the Hopes and Joys it affords them, and to deliver the Wicked from the wholesom Terrors it inspires, to lay open natural Religion, that Morality which they pretend to cry up and admire, naked and destitute of its most powerful Supports, neither enforc'd by Promises nor guarded by Terrors, under Pretence of leaving it to its own native Force and Beauty? I must own, that after all the mighty Zeal they profess for the Law of Nature, I can't help suspecting that one of their principal Prejudices against

Christianity is, that it sets the great Principles and Doctrines even of natural Religion, such as the Doctrine of a Providence, the Immortality of the Soul, and a future State of Retributions, in too clear and strong a Light, which otherwise wou'd be left at large to the Disputes of the Philosophers, and perhaps be regarded only as the Amusements of the Schools.

That this is not a rash Censure, will further appear by considering another Passage, in which this Writer draws a Parallel between Deists and Christians, p. 367, 368. *. “ ’Tis the View (says he) “ with which an Action is done that makes it moral; “ he who pays his Debts out of a Principle of Honesty does a moral Action; while he who does “ the same for fear of the Law can’t be said to act “ morally. And can he who does a Thing to avoid “ being punish’d, or in hopes of being rewarded “ hereafter, and for the same Reason is ready to do “ the contrary, merit at least equally with him who “ is in love with his Duty, and is govern’d, not “ by servile Motives, but by the original Obligation “ of the moral Fitness of Things, in Conformity to “ the Nature and in Imitation of the perfect Will “ of God? This the Doctor will not deny to be “ true Deism, and they who do not act thus, deserve not the Title of true Deists.”

The Author here evidently inveighs against acting with a View to future Rewards and Punishments; he represents those that do so as govern’d by *servile Motives*, and yet one Article of that which he calls the Deist’s Creed, and which he wou’d have to be a true Account of their Principles, is, that there must be a State of Rewards and Punishments in the Life to come; see p. 365 †. And he saith of all these Principles, as the Doctor represents them, and therefore of this amongst the rest, that they have a direct

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* P. 332, 333. † P. 330.

Tendency to make Men good. How partially does this Writer judge! When he thinks it proper to represent it as a Principle of Deism that there shall be a future State of Rewards and Punishments, then it is a very good Principle and of an excellent Tendency; but this very Principle, when confirm'd and set in a clearer stronger Light by the Christian Revelation, has quite lost its Tendency, and takes Men off from the Love of Virtue for its own sake, and from attending to the original Obligation of the moral Fitness of Things. He supposes a Christian that believes a State of future Retributions, to act, not from any Approbation of Virtue, but purely *in hope of being rewarded hereafter, and to avoid being punish'd*, and that *for the same Reason he is ready to do the contrary*. And may not this be equally said of every Deist that believes future Rewards and Punishments? Why shou'd it be more mercenary and servile in the one than in the other? And if a View to the Reward be consistent, in a Deist, with the Love of Virtue and Goodness, why shou'd it not be suppos'd consistent with it in a Christian? Why shou'd he suppose concerning a Christian more than a Deist, that for the same Reason (that is, for the Hope of being rewarded or Fear of being punish'd hereafter) he is *ready to do the contrary*, that is, to practise Vice instead of Virtue? But indeed the Supposition itself is not to be admitted; that eternal Glory shou'd be annex'd to a vicious Course of Action, and eternal Misery be the Consequence of a virtuous Life here on Earth. 'Tis infinitely absurd, and not reconcilable to the Notion of a just, a wise and good God, and therefore impossible; but if it were possible, I don't know whether it wou'd not be unnatural to chuse eternal Misery on any Supposition whatsoever.

The Reward Christianity proposes is of such a nature, that to aspire after it has nothing mean or

fordid in it, but argues a noble Temper of Mind. For it is the Perfection of Holiness, and Purity, and Goodness in the Enjoyment of God himself the chiefest Good; and to suppose that those Persons who are animated with a View to this Reward, wou'd, for the same Reason, that is, for the sake of the same Reward, engage in a contrary Conduct, is a self-confounding Supposition; it is to suppose the same Persons to be so in love with Virtue, as to seek for Happiness in the Perfection of it; and then that, out of this very Love of perfect Virtue, and for the sake of it, they shou'd engage in a Course of Vice and Wickedness. But why shou'd this be here represented as the Character of a Christian, as distinguish'd from the true Deist, that he acts from a View to future Rewards and Punishments? Does none but the Christian believe them? Or is it the Character of a *true Deist*, that he has no View at all to those future Rewards and Punishments, which is in effect to say that he does not believe them; for if he does believe them, 'tis impossible and contrary to human Nature to have no Regard to them, and not to be influenc'd by Motives that are of such vast Importance to our Happiness? And is not this to give a very disadvantageous Character of the Deists and of Deism, and to give Christianity a vast Advantage above it? Has not this Author unawares opened Part of his Scheme, and shewn what he wou'd be at? And I can't help suspecting, that one great Quarrel against Christianity is its setting future Retributions in too clear and strong a Light, which wou'd not suffer Men to be easy in their Vices.

But the Deist is *in love with his Duty*, and is govern'd, not by *servile Motives*, but by the *original Obligation of the moral Fitness of Things, in Conformity to the Nature, and in Imitation of the perfect Will of God*. I have observ'd before, p. 180. how

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little Right this Author has, upon his Principles, to talk of the Deists acting *in Conformity to the Nature*, and *in Imitation of the perfect Will of God*? Nor do I well understand what he means here by his being *govern'd by the original Obligation of the moral Fitness of Things*, in Opposition to his being govern'd by *servile Motives*? Does not he himself explain the *Fitness of Things* to be a Fitness for promoting our Good or Happiness? And must not then the original Obligation of the Fitness of Things be, according to him, the Obligation that the Fitness of Things, for our Good, lays upon us? So that, according to him, the Foundation of all moral Fitness and that which renders it obliging, is its Tendency to our Good or Happiness; and if so, it must be either our Good here or in a future State, taking in the whole of our Existence. And if it be not thought mercenary and servile to be engag'd by a Regard to the Satisfaction Virtue yields, and the Influence it has on our own and the publick Good in this Life, why shou'd it be thought mercenary to act with a View to the happy Effects it will produce in a better World and a nobler Community, in a future State of Existence, which must be suppos'd to be of as much greater Importance than the present, as that future Life is suppos'd to be of infinitely greater Duration than the present, and of a higher and more excellent kind? The Man that embraces and pursues Virtue merely for the Good it is suppos'd to produce now, without Regard to a future State, must, if he acts consistently, whenever Virtue subjects him to greater Inconveniences in this present State, reject it, and embrace Vice for its present Advantages; whereas the Man that acts with a View to a future State, will not be shock'd by any present Inconveniences that may attend a steady Adherence to the Cause of Virtue and Righteousness; for he extends and enlarges his Views to a nobler State of

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Existence,

Existence, and therefore manifests a truer Greatness of Spirit, and a more generous Soul.

Does not this Author say, that “ the only innate Principle in Man, is the Desire of his own Happiness, and the Goodness of God requires no more than a right cultivating this Principle, &c. p. 363 *.” And why then does he blame a Man for acting up to what he makes the only innate Principle in the human Nature? If, as he tells us, all that the Goodness of God requires, is a right cultivating this Principle, that is, the Desire of Happiness, why is a Man to be counted selfish for cultivating this Principle, and pursuing what he takes to be for his highest Good? Does not this Gentleman frequently instruct us to measure Good and Evil, and the Fitness of Things, merely by that which is so to us, and that we are under no Obligation to pursue, nor can God himself command us any thing, but what we know to be for our Good, and to tend in the Nature of Things to our own Happiness, antecedently to that Command? And shall the Man that talks thus, pretend to set up for a disinterested Regard to Virtue, and blame those that are animated to pursue it with the Views of a future Reward, that is, of the Happiness it will raise us to in a future State, when he himself makes the very Reason of its being obligatory, to be only the Good or Happiness it produces? Nay, when he wou’d have us so very mercenary, as before we obey any Command, to examine whether it tends to our own Benefit or Interest, and if it does not (though it shou’d bring no Hurt with it, yet if it brings no apparent Advantage to us) we are under no Obligation to obey? So that the Measure of our Obedience must be our own Interest. What an inconsistent Scheme is that of our Author? To be govern’d by the moral Fitness of Things (which he talks so much of, and which makes so glorious a Sound)

Sound) is nothing else, according to him, than to judge of things by their Tendency to promote our Good or Happiness, and yet we are to be govern'd by the Obligation of the moral Fitness of Things, without any view to our Happiness, though their Tendency to produce and promote it, is that in which their Obligation and Fitness consists. Does not this Writer in the preceding Page, p. 366*, give it as a Reason, why the Religion of Nature (that Religion which he there represents as the Religion of true Deists) cannot fail to make Men in love with their Duty, because they must plainly see that and their Interest to be inseparable? And now he represents a true Deist to be one that is in love with his Duty, without any Regard to his Interest, when the Reason he gave but just before, why they shou'd be in love with their Duty, was, that they must plainly see it to be inseparable from their Interest. Here he represents Men's having any Regard to their own Happiness in the Performance of their Duty, as a being govern'd by servile Motives; there he represents it as a setting Religion in a beautiful and amiable Light, to consider it as tending to promote our truest Interest, and that in this very Tendency, its Beauty and Excellency does consist. Here he says, that for a Man to be in love with his Duty for its own sake, abstracted from all Advantages attending it, *this is true Deism*, and *they who do not act thus, deserve not the Title of true Deists*; or, in other Words, none are true Deists, but those that in the Performance of their Duty, have no Regard to future Rewards or Punishments; but there he represents it as one of the *true Deist's* Principles, that he believes future Rewards and Punishments, and that these Principles (which here he intimates tend to make Men servile, and ruin the Merit of their Services) have a direct Tendency to make Men good, by caus-

ing them to see that their Duty and Interest are inseparable. How shall we judge of what this Gentleman understands by Deism? or who are his true Deists? All that I can gather from it is, that with this Author all are true Deists that oppose Revelation; and if they do so, he will be very easy as to lesser Differences, whether they own future Rewards and Punishments or not, or indeed whether they own a Providence or not; these are Trifles, small Differences; yea methinks he can't but approve those disinterested Deists, that do not believe and have no Regard to a future State, as the nobler of the two, and Men of greater Merit, and more perfect Virtue.

Another Passage I wou'd take notice of in which he pretends to give an Account of his true Deists, and compares them with the Christian, is p. 371*. where, after having said, that a previous Examination into the Doctrines of Scripture is highly necessary, he adds, " the Difference between those who wou'd
 " ingross the Name of Christians to themselves, and
 " those Christian Deists, as I may justly call them, is,
 " that the former dare not examine into the Truth
 " of Scripture-Doctrines, lest they shou'd seem to
 " question the Veracity of the Scriptures; whereas
 " the latter, who believe not the Doctrines because
 " contain'd in Scripture, but the Scriptures on ac-
 " count of the Doctrines, are under no such Appre-
 " hension. For having critically examined those
 " Doctrines by that Reason which God has given
 " them, to distinguish Religion from Superstition;
 " they are sure not to run into any Error of Mo-
 " ment, notwithstanding the confessed Obscurity of
 " the Scriptures; and those many Mistakes that
 " have crept into the Text, whether by Accident
 " or Design."

It is pleasant enough here to see, that this Gentleman and his Friends set up for Christians, yea and

better Christians too, though they do not believe in Christ nor his divine Mission, than those that firmly believe all this. But let us consider the Reasons he gives why he and his Brethren shou'd have the Preference.

The former, says he, that is, those that, as he speaks, *wou'd ingross the Name of Christian to themselves*, or in other words, those that believe the Bible to contain a divine Revelation, *dare not examine into the Truth of Scripture-Doctrines, lest they shou'd seem to question the Veracity of the Scriptures.* This is an unfair and unjust Representation. They dare *examine into the Scripture-Doctrines*, and upon a fair and impartial Examination are convinc'd that they are worthy of God, and of an excellent Tendency; and when they further consider the Attestations and Evidence whereby those Doctrines stand confirm'd, they are perswaded of their Truth. They find upon Examination, that many of the Doctrines contain'd there relate to the great Principles of natural Religion, such as those concerning the Attributes and Providence of God, the Worship due to him in Opposition to all Idolatry, the Obligations of Morality, or the Necessity of Holiness, Truth, Justice, Charity, Temperance, a future State of Retributions, the Happiness that shall be conferr'd upon the Righteous, and the Punishment that shall be inflicted upon the Wicked; they find upon Examination, that these Doctrines are highly agreeable to Reason; and it is a great Satisfaction to them, that in Things of such Importance they are not left merely to find them out by tedious Deductions and abstracted Reasonings (which often leave some Doubts and Suspicions in the Mind, even where we are not able distinctly to point out a Flaw in them) but that they have them expressly and strongly asserted in a Revelation confirm'd by such glorious Proofs and Attestations. And with respect to the peculiar Doctrines

trines of the Gospel, such as those relating to the divine Mission and Mediation of Jesus Christ, his dying for our Sins, his Resurrection from the Dead, and Ascension into Heaven, Remission of Sins thro' his Name, the Assistances of his Grace and Spirit, his Coming to Judgment, the Resurrection of the Dead, &c. As these relate to things which they cou'd not have known without Revelation, so upon a fair Examination they find nothing in them impossible or absurd, nothing but what is worthy of the Wisdom and Righteousness and Goodness of God, and admirably suited to the State and Necessities of Mankind; and what, supposing it true, has a happy Tendency to ingage Sinners to return and yield themselves to God, to love him with a superlative Affection, and fear him with the profoundest Reverence, to comfort the truly Penitent and Sincere, and encourage and animate them to a patient Continuance in well-doing, without giving the least Encouragement to the obstinately wicked and presumptuous Sinner. And though the excellent Tendency of these Doctrines cannot alone prove them true, yet when they find that those that first publish'd them to the World, declar'd they were sent by God himself for that purpose, and in Confirmation of their Mission wrought such astonishing Miracles as far exceeded all human Power, and which therefore cou'd only be done by the immediate Power of God himself, or by some good Being superior to Man, acting under the Influence and Direction of the Supreme; since evil Beings wou'd never lend their Assistance to confirm a Religion and Doctrines of such a Tendency, the principal Aim of which was to prepare Men for eternal Happiness in a better World, by a Life of Purity and Righteousness in this; I say, when they consider this, it convinces them that those Doctrines are not only good in their Tendency, but that they are actually true, and that it is the Will of God

God they shou'd receive them as such. Thus their Examination of the Scripture-Doctrines, which they find to be of such an excellent Tendency, prepares them for believing them; but then the Reason why they actually believe them to be true, is because they are taught and deliver'd by Persons that were extraordinarily sent of God to instruct Mankind, and who produc'd the most illustrious convincing Proofs of their divine Mission. And what is there absurd in such a Conduct? Why shou'd this Author represent it as a strange thing, that those who believe the Scriptures to be written by Men extraordinarily sent by God to instruct the World, and infallibly guided by his Spirit; is it strange, I say, that those who have this Idea of the Scriptures shou'd give Credit to the Doctrines contain'd there; that is, is it strange that Men shou'd believe what they regard to be the Word of God, and that they shou'd receive things upon the Credit of it, which they wou'd not have believ'd or known without such a Testimony? Must not even those that deny the Divinity of the Scriptures, yet own that on Supposition God reveals a Thing, his revealing it is a Proof of its Truth; which depends upon this undeniable Principle, that God cannot reveal a Falshood, that he cannot deceive or be deceiv'd, and that therefore what he discovers and wou'd have us believe as true, must certainly be so? Shall I trust and believe God himself in nothing, but what my own Reason cou'd have discover'd without him; and whenever he informs me of any thing I did not know before, reject it for no other Reason, but because I have no more than his Testimony for it?

But let us consider what he represents to be the Conduct of the Deists, with respect to Scripture. *They, says he, believe not the Doctrines because contain'd in Scripture, but the Scripture on account of the Doctrines.* Do the Deists then (those Gentle-
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men whom he is pleas'd to honour with the Title of *Christian Deists*) believe the Doctrines of Scripture? Do they believe the peculiar Doctrines of Christianity, relating to the divine Mission of our Lord Jesus Christ, his dying for the Sins of the World, his Resurrection and Ascension, Remission of Sins through his Blood, and Sanctification by his Spirit, and his Coming to judge the World? Let them declare this, and we will not deny them the Name of Christians. But if the contrary is evident, if they reject all Notion of Revelation as Priestcraft and Imposture, and all the peculiar Doctrines of Christianity as false and fictitious, how can they be said to believe *the Scripture on account of the Doctrines*, and under this Pretence put in a Claim to the Name of Christians, when they believe neither the Doctrines nor the Scripture, and it may be more justly said that they reject the Scripture on account of the Doctrines? What an insincere disingenuous way of talking is this? It is easy to gather from it, that the Author wou'd not fail upon Occasion to put in practice his own Doctrine concerning the Lawfulness and Benefit of Falshood and Prevarication in many Cases, and that if his Convenience requir'd it, he cou'd declare his Belief of the Christian Creed, though he does not believe one Word of it except perhaps the first Article. This Gentleman and his Brethren often inveigh against the Frauds and Prevarications of the Clergy, but I believe it wou'd be hard to produce a greater Instance of it than in this Passage.

If there be a Revelation given at all, it must be to inform us of things which we cou'd not have known, or at least could not have known so well and so certainly without it; and in such a Case to pretend to pay a Regard to that Revelation, and yet receive nothing upon the Credit of it, wou'd be a very absurd and inconsistent Conduct. When therefore this Writer tells us concerning those he calls *Christian Deists*, that *they believe not the Doctrines because*

because contain'd in Scripture; it is to say in other Words, the Scripture is of no Weight and Authority with them at all, and they will receive nothing upon the Credit of it; and our Author's Treatment of the Scriptures in this Book will not suffer us to doubt that this is his own Sentiment. But do we not in many Cases give Credit to the Testimony of wise and good Men, and receive things upon their Testimony, which we shou'd not have receiv'd or known but from their Testimony? Are there not many things which we believe because contain'd in credible Histories, and will the Deists pretend a Regard to the Scriptures, and at the same time deny 'em the Respect due to other Histories written by wise and good Men? To say we believe the Histories for the Facts, and not the Facts for the Histories, is not very good Sense; for how do we come to know those Facts but because they are transmitted to us in authentick Histories? or cou'd we possibly have known those Facts without 'em? It may therefore be justly said, that we receive 'em on the Credit of those Histories. Let us then desire these *Christian Deists* but to yield the same Credit to the Scriptures, that they wou'd to any credible History writ by a Man of Probity, that was himself a Witness to the Facts he relates; even in this Case it must be said, that they believe the Facts because contain'd in the Scriptures, recorded in authentick Writings, written by honest Men that were Witnesses of those Facts, and in the very Age in which those Facts were done. But if they believe 'em not to be written by Persons of Probity, but by Knaves and Impostors, and that consequently the Gospel is a mere Imposture, how can they be said to believe the Scriptures at all, or to pay any regard to 'em, or arrogate to themselves the Title of Christian Deists? On the other hand, if they believe the Scripture-History, and receive the Facts related there, they must also believe the
peculiar

peculiar Doctrines of Christianity. For many of those Doctrines relate to the Facts, the one being inseparable from the other. For the principal Facts are, that Jesus Christ was born of a Virgin, that he perform'd the most illustrious Miracles, that he suffer'd and died, and rose again on the third Day, that he ascended into Heaven, and afterwards poured forth his Spirit upon his Disciples in a wonderful manner, so that they were enabled in his Name to perform the most glorious Miracles, and were instructed and inlightened by an extraordinary Illumination in the Knowledge of the deep Things of God, that they went as commission'd by him thro' all the World, preaching the Gospel or the glad Tidings of Reconciliation and Salvation to Mankind through Jesus Christ, and confirming the Message they deliver'd by the most glorious and astonishing Works done in the View of Multitudes, &c. Now the peculiar Doctrines of Christianity have a close Connection with these Facts, and if we receive the latter we must receive the former too. Supposing the Facts related concerning Christ and his Apostles to be true, the Doctrines they taught may be justly receiv'd on their Credit; that is, we may justly believe them, because those taught them who were extraordinarily sent by God to instruct Mankind; and to pretend to believe this, and not give Credit to their Doctrines, wou'd be an Inconsistency.

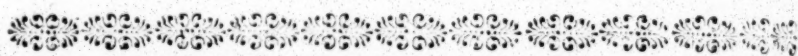
The Conduct this Author thinks reasonable with respect to the Scriptures, is indeed very extraordinary. He is for pretending a Regard to 'em, and at the same time for believing nothing on their Credit. It is hard to please these Gentlemen. If the Scriptures had nothing in them but what Men might have discover'd themselves by the mere Force of their own Reason, they are needless; for where is the Necessity of an extraordinary Revelation, to tell Men what they knew as well before? But if they disc

any thing which Men did not know before, and cou'd not have known unless it had been there reveal'd, this shall also be turn'd to their disadvantage: to believe the Doctrines on account of the Scriptures, is represented as a foolish Conduct; since they have nothing else to support 'em but the Authority of Scripture, and this is nothing at all.

The Author concludes concerning his Christian Deists, that "having critically examin'd the Scripture-Doctrines by that Reason which God has given them, to distinguish Religion from Superstition, they are sure not to run into any Error of Moment, notwithstanding the confess'd Obscurity of the Scriptures, and those many Mistakes that have crept into the Text, whether by Accident or Design."

It is not fair in this Author to talk of the *confess'd Obscurity of the Scriptures*, as if this was a Matter universally acknowledg'd, when yet he knows that it has been all along and still is an important Principle maintain'd by all Protestants, that the Scripture is sufficiently clear and plain in all things necessary to be known or done in order to Salvation. The Mistakes which he says have crept into the Text, are not such as alter any one Doctrine, or any one Fact of Christianity. But not to take any particular Notice of these Things at present, which our Author here only hints at, and which I shall fully consider afterwards, I wou'd ask how came the Deists to be so privileg'd, that *they are sure not to run into any Error of Moment?* They *examine Doctrines by the Reason God has given them*, &c. But has not God given Reason to others as well as them, and may they not make an ill Use of their Reason as well as other People? And thereby fall into very dangerous Errors in Matters of great Moment? Did not the *Epicureans* pretend to make use of their Reason as well as our modern Deists, to distinguish between
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Religion and Superstition; and did this exempt 'em from Errors of Moment? I cannot therefore see upon what Foundation this Privilege of Deistical Infallibility is built. It might further be ask'd, to which among the several Sets of Deists this Privilege belongs, or whether it belongs to all of 'em, however divided among themselves about the Immortality of the Soul, a State of future Rewards and Punishments, Man's Free-agency, &c. which others might be apt to think Matters of Moment?



CHAP. XI.

The Author's Pretence of introducing a new and glorious Face of Things examin'd. That his Doctrine of Sincerity, as he manages it, is of small Comfort and Advantage, and leaves little Room for any Men, or even for the Deists themselves; to hope for the divine Favour and Acceptance. His Proposal for an universal Indifferency to all Religion, as the only Remedy against Persecution; and the Charge of Persecution he advances against the Advocates for Revelation, turn'd upon himself. The Conclusion, with a brief Representation of the pernicious Tendency, and manifold Inconsistencies of the Author's Scheme.

THERE is no Passage in his whole Book, in which the Author talks more magnificently of the Benefits that wou'd accrue to Mankind from his Scheme, than p. 413, 414*. where he pretends that it wou'd introduce a new Heaven and a new Earth;

* P. 374.

Earth, a new and glorious Face of Things. There are two Advantages that he particularly proposes; the one is, to deliver Men from the Terrors and Anxieties they are under *for fear of mistaking in speculative Matters*; the other is, to put an end to all Persecutions and Animosities, and *to cause an universal Love and Benevolence among the whole Race of Mankind.* Let us see whether he offers any thing that may support these glorious Pretences.

The great Principle he lays down as what wou'd produce these happy Effects is this, that "all that are equally sincere are equally acceptable to God; that this wou'd free Men from that miserable Perplexity in which the Fear of mistaking in speculative Matters involves them." He asks, "What Assurance upon any other Ground can even the Generality of Christians have, that they do not err most dangerously, when they consider what Divisions there have been from the Beginning among Christians about such Points, p. 413*." And desires Persons to "consider what Comfort, what Satisfaction it must give a Man, especially on his Death-bed, to be certain that he is not accountable for any Error in Opinion, if he has, according as his Circumstances permit, done his best to discover the Will of God, p. 414."

In order to judge of the Advantages of this Principle, taken in the Sense which our Author puts upon it, and as it is explain'd by him, let us examine a little into his Notion of Sincerity. He seems in the Passage last cited to understand by a Man that is sincere, "one that has, according as his Circumstances permit, done his best to discover the Will of God." And again, p. 410†. he saith, that "if God will judge Men as they are accountable, that is, as they are rational, must not the Judgment of the most righteous Judge hold an exact

Vol. I. U "Proportion

“ Proportion to the Use they have made of their
 “ Reason? And if Men’s State in this Life be a
 “ State of Probation, and for that Cause they are
 “ made moral Agents, capable of knowing Good
 “ from Evil, and consequently of doing every thing
 “ that’s fit to be done, must they not be dealt with
 “ hereafter according to the Use they have made of
 “ their moral Agency?” To the same purpose he
 speaks, and almost in the same words, in his first
 Chapter, p. 5, 6. Sincerity then, according to this
 Author, must imply, that Men have done their best
 to discover the Will of God, that they have made
 the best Use of their Reason and moral Agency they
 are capable of. And since the same Gentleman that
 gives this Account of Sincerity, does also tell us,
 that every Man is capable both of knowing and do-
 ing the whole Will of God, or whatever it is his
 Will we shou’d know, believe, profess, and prac-
 tise; it follows, that according to him no Man can
 be said to be sincere, or to have done his best, and
 that consequently no Man can hope to be justified
 before God, that does not both know and do the
 whole Will of God, or all that it is his Will Men
 should know, believe, profess and practise; so that
 Sincerity, according to him, is not consistent with
 Ignorance of a Man’s Duty, or with imperfect Obe-
 dience. And thus we see what this Author’s com-
 fortable Scheme comes to at last, the Advantages of
 which he sets forth so gloriously.

He has indeed thought proper to add a Limita-
 tion, *of a Man’s doing his best, according as his
 Circumstances permit, to discover the Will of God,*
 p. 414*. and he has other Passages to the same pur-
 pose. But I don’t see how he can make use of this
 Limitation, in Consistency with his own Scheme.
 For this Limitation supposes that some Men are in
 much more advantageous Circumstances than others
 for

for knowing the divine Will; a Supposition very true in it self, but which this Author cannot make without destroying a good Part of what he labours in this Book to shew, *viz.* That the Law of Nature, that Law which he supposes to be obligatory on all Mankind, and which contains all that God will have Men to know, believe, profess, and practise, is equally obvious to all Mankind, that it is at all Times *equally discoverable* by all, even those of the meanest Capacity, and that cannot read in their Mother-Tongue, p. 295*. and that no Man can have a *just Plea from Ignorance* not to be tried by that Law, p. 10†. This Gentleman therefore has no Right to talk, as he sometimes does, of Men's knowing natural Religion as far as is necessary in their Circumstances, and of their being accepted *if they live up to their different Degrees of Light*; for he supposes all Men to have an equal Light given them, the Light of Nature, which he all along represents as equal, uniform, universal. Those indeed who suppose that Men are now in great Darknesh, and under great Disabilities to their Duty, may also suppose that God will mercifully make Allowances to human Ignorance and Infirmary; and that Errors in Knowledge and Faults in Practice may be consistent with such a Sincerity as God will in his infinite Goodness accept. But this Author precludes himself from this Plea.

There is no Allowance on his Scheme for involuntary Errors. For all Errors in religious Matters must, according to him, be voluntary. He tells us himself, p. 178||. "that the clear Light [*viz.* of Reason] "which God hath given Men to distinguish "between religious Truth and Falshood, cannot, if "duly attended to, deceive them in Things of so "great Moment." And, p. 277‡. after having said that "what we call Instinct is a certain and in-

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" fallible

* P. 267.

† P. 9.

|| P. 157.

‡ P. 250.

“fallible Guide for inferior Animals,” he adds, that “Reason is as certain a Guide for rational Creatures, as Instinct is for irrational.” Reason therefore must, according to him, be a certain and infallible Guide in religious Matters: If therefore we be mistaken in judging of religious Truth and Falshood, it must be for want of *duly attending* to our Reason, and the Light God hath given us; and if we do not duly attend to it, we cannot be said to have *made the best Use of our Reason and of our moral Agency*, and then by his Definition of that Sincerity which alone will render us acceptable to God, we are not sincere; so that upon his Scheme our being in an Error in religious Matters, or our not distinguishing between religious Truth and Falshood, must be a Proof of our Insincerity, and therefore must be a Bar to our Acceptance. And is this the Author that pretends to *free Men from the miserable Perplexity in which the Fear of mistaking in speculative Matters involves them?* How can he pretend to talk of the *Comfort and Satisfaction it must yield a Man on his Death-bed, to be certain he shall be accountable for no Error in Opinion, if he has done his best to discover the Will of God*, when, according to him, a Man’s being in an Error, or mistaking a religious Truth for Falshood, or the contrary, is a plain Proof that he has not done his best, nor made a due Improvement of his Reason, which, if duly attended to, wou’d have guarded him from any Error in such Matters? How can he say, as he sometimes does, that if a Man has sincerely examin’d, even tho’ he shou’d be mistaken, he has done his Duty and all that God requires; when, according to him, a sincere Examination, or a Man’s making the best use of his Reason, will certainly lead him to the Truth; and if notwithstanding his Examination, he still judges wrong concerning religious Truth or Falshood, this shews that his Examination

was not sincere, or of the right kind, and consequently cannot approve him to God.

Indeed I don't see but that after all the Author's glorious Pretences of delivering Men from their Fears, all Mankind must according to him be in a miserable Condition, and under an inevitable Condemnation. All that he offers concerning the Clearness of the Light of Nature to all Mankind, tends to destroy the Plea of Sincerity, which might otherwise be offer'd as some Excuse for the Frailties and Errors they are guilty of. He tells us, that "the Light of Nature, like that of the Sun, is universal, and wou'd, did not Men shut the Eyes of their Understanding, or suffer others to blind them, soon disperse all those Mists and Fogs which arise from false Traditions, or false Interpretations of the true Tradition, p. 12*." And again, he tells us, that all Superstition arises from "Men's not adhering to those Notions Reason dictates concerning the Nature of God." That "Reason and Religion are inseparable, so that no rational Creature can be ignorant of it [that is, of the true Religion] "who attends to the Dictates of his own Mind, p. 379†." And yet he also declares, that Superstition hath universally prevail'd in all Ages and Nations from the Beginning; none have been exempted from it but *the free-thinking Few*. He must therefore suppose concerning all Ages and Nations, that they did not make a right Use of their Reason or moral Agency, that they did not attend to the Light that was given them, and to the Dictates of their own Minds, that they all shut their Eyes against the clearest Light, and consequently were all destitute of that Sincerity, without which they cannot hope for Acceptance with God, or for any Reward from him.

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* P. 10.

† P. 343.

Our Author seems to value himself upon his entertaining a better Opinion than others do, of the Condition of the Heathens, and mightily blames Dr. Clark for speaking as he does of the corrupt and degenerate State into which they were fallen; and yet I can't help thinking, that the Representation he himself gives of their State, renders it much more hopeless, and leaves less room for any favourable Thoughts concerning them, than even the most zealous Advocates for Revelation are willing to allow. He tells us, that the Law of Nature was so clear, *that no well-meaning Gentile cou'd be ignorant of it*, and at the same time he often supposes, that the Idolatries and Superstitions in which they were generally involv'd were directly contrary to the Law of Nature; he must therefore suppose that there was scarce such a thing as a *well-meaning Gentile* for many Ages, which is to cast them at once out of all Hopes of the divine Favour. He supposes that "Mankind at all times have entertain'd such Notions of God as are intirely inconsistent with his Nature, and contrary to what their Reason, if attended to, wou'd inform them of the Design and End of the Laws of God, p. 88 *." And he particularly charges the Heathens on the account of their worshipping the *Mediatory Gods*, as he calls them, as *entertaining the most unworthy Notions of the Supreme Being, as debasing God, and cloathing him with our Infirmities*, and that *if they had thought at all*, they cou'd not have fallen into such Absurdities, p. 86 †. 'Tis plain then that he supposes the Heathens in general, not the Vulgar only, but the Philosophers themselves, particularly the *Platonists*, the most refin'd of them all, to have entertain'd the most unworthy Notions of God, contrary to the clearest Dictates of Nature, and which they cou'd not have entertain'd if they had attended to

* P. 76. † P. 73, 74.

to the Light that was given them to distinguish between Religion and Superstition, or even if they had allow'd themselves to think at all; and that consequently they did not make the best Use of their Reason to discover the Will of God, and therefore were not sincere, nor consequently accepted of God.

I don't know whether it will make the Case of the Heathens better, that he supposes the Jews, and Christians, and Mahometans to be under the same Condemnation. For they are all, in his Opinion, chargeable with gross Superstition, and therefore none of them can take any Comfort from the Author's Doctrine of Sincerity; because none of them have made a proper Use of their Reason and moral Agency, but have shut their Eyes against that clear universal Light, which, if attended to, wou'd have taught them easily to distinguish between Religion and Superstition, and wou'd have dispell'd the Mists and Fogs of a false Tradition; they must therefore, according to him, be all of them destitute of that Sincerity, which he makes to be the only Title to the divine Favour, and therefore must be all without any solid Hopes of Salvation, except the *free-thinking Few*, that is, those who like our Author reject all Revelation, despise all the Religions in the World, and believe none of them; all the rest have been in all Ages, and still are involv'd in an universal Degeneracy and Apostacy from the clear Light of Nature, and have fallen into Superstition, which in his Opinion is worse than Atheism.

And even with respect to his own Friends, the *free-thinking Few*, those who profess to adhere to pure natural Religion, his Scheme is not so favourable as it seems to be at first View. The Question is, Upon what Grounds do they hope for Acceptance with God, or to be justified before him? He tells us, that *God gave Mankind from the Beginning a Rule or Law for their Conduct, by the Obser-*

vance of which they were acceptable to him, p. 3. And he wou'd be glad to know, why this Rule has lost its Virtue, and will not now render Men as acceptable to God as ever, p. 399. And this original Law of Nature, by the Observance of which alone he supposes Men can be justified and accepted with God, he asserts to be a Law of unchangeable Purity and Perfection, a Law without Defect; and to which nothing cou'd be added by our Saviour, p. 82. and that if Mankind had govern'd their Actions by it, it wou'd have render'd them as perfect as their Natures are capable of, p. 399. that is, they wou'd have attain'd to a State of perfect Virtue. I don't see therefore upon what Grounds he and his Friends can hope to be justified by that original Law of Nature, except they can plead, that they have attain'd to perfect Virtue, and that they have in their Practice observ'd and fulfill'd that Law of unchangeable Purity and Perfection.*

But he will say this Law accepts of Sincerity, that is, of a Man's doing the best he can. Thus he tells us, p. 5. that " Men's using their Faculties
 " after the best Manner they can, must answer the
 " End for which God gave them, and justify their
 " Conduct, p. 5." And that " God's Judgment
 " must hold proportion to the Use they have made
 " of their Reason, and it wou'd be in vain to use it
 " if the due Use of it wou'd not justify them be-
 " fore God, p. 6." But since he supposes that God *adjusted* Man's original Ability and Understanding to that perfect Law, and that this original Ability still continues; since he so often supposes that all Men have a clear Light and Knowledge of that Law of Nature, and that their Reason, *if duly attended to*, cannot deceive them in judging of religious Truth and Falshood, and that all Men are *capable of doing as well as knowing the Will of God,*
 that

that is, of obeying that Law of unchangeable Purity and Perfection; I don't see how he can consistently suppose that any Man has *used his Faculties after the best manner he can*, or has made a *due Use of his Reason*, who is in any Instance ignorant or mistaken about that Law, or who in his Practice falls short of the Duties requir'd in that Law; and consequently I don't see, that any Deist upon his Principles, or he himself, can have any Ground to hope for being accepted with God, or justified before him, except he be sure that he has not fallen short in his Practice of what that Law requires, nor has mistaken any of the Principles of that Law. No Man, according to him, can plead Ignorance of that Law, nay nor Want of Ability neither; he precludes himself and all Men from all Plea for Mercy on this account. All the fine Things he sometimes saith of the human Nature in its present State, the clear and perfect Light all Men have to know their Duty, and their Ability to discharge it, only serves to render their Ignorance and Disobedience more inexcusable, and to bind the Curse and Sentence of the Law faster upon them. Whereas the Gospel represents things as they really are, that all Mankind are fallen into a State of great Corruption, Darkness, and Disability, that God pities us in this State, and has in his infinite Mercy provided a suitable Remedy for us, and will mercifully pardon our Infirmities, and accept and reward our Obedience, though attended with many Failures and Defects, if proceeding from a Heart prevailingly devoted to him.

The Sum is this: Supposing the Tenor of the original Law of Nature to run thus, that those that use their Faculties after the best manner they can, and that make the best Use of their Reason (which is the Supposition this Author makes) shall be accepted and justified before God, yet this does not say, that he will justify those that have not made

the best Use of their Faculties and of their Reason; and it has been shewn, that this Gentleman must suppose this to have been the Case of almost all Mankind in all Ages, Heathens, Jews and Christians. Nor will he and his Friends have any Benefit from it, if either they be conscious to themselves that in their Practice they fall short of what that Law of unchangeable Purity and Perfection requires, or if they be in an Error about the Principles of that Law; [as some of them certainly must, since they are divided about those Principles, and 'tis impossible they all shou'd be in the right] because this wou'd argue, according to him, that they have not made the best Use of their Faculties, nor duly attended to their Reason, which yet he seems to make the only Plea for being accepted with God. So that after all the Author's Boasts of the Advantages of his Scheme, it really lays a Foundation for perpetual Anxiety and Terror, and leaves little room for any Man, or even for the Deists themselves, to hope for the divine Favour or Acceptance.

This will further appear, if it be consider'd that this Gentleman tells us, in his first Chapter, that " God
 " never intended Mankind shou'd be at any time with-
 " out Religion, or have false Religions, and that there is
 " but one true Religion which all have been ever bound
 " to believe and profess, p. 5. * " And again, that " God design'd that all Mankind shou'd at all
 " times know what he wills them to know, believe,
 " profess and practise." And must not this, according to his own way of arguing, cause many Fears and Anxieties? For when Men hear there are some Things which it is necessary for them to believe, profess and practise, how can they help being solicitous to know what these are, and being in pain lest they have mistaken them? This Writer is pleas'd frequently to mention it to the disadvantage of Christianity, in order to shew what an anxious State
 professed

professed Christians must be in, that they have Fundamentals, and yet are divided about them. He asks, "What Assurance can they have that they do not err most dangerously, when they consider what Divisions there have been, from the Beginning, among Christians about such Points? And that the Guides of their Churches, though they agree in saying their Fundamentals are plain, have not always the same Set of Fundamentals, and when they have, widely differ in explaining them, p.413 *." See also p. 242 †. The Foundation upon which this Reflection proceeds is indeed very wrong, and that is, that it is impossible to be certain of the Truth of any thing about which Men have been divided in their Sentiments. For then there is nothing certain at all, not even the Being of a God. It is not merely Men's agreeing or disagreeing about Points that renders them more or less certain; this is to be tried by other Arguments; and if, upon an impartial Examination, I find good Reason to believe a Thing my self, it ought not to make me doubt of it merely that I see others deny it. But not to urge this at present, what I wou'd observe is, that this way of arguing bears as hard upon the Deists as upon the Christians. It appears from the Passages now cited, that there must be Fundamentals upon his own Scheme. For what are Things necessary to be *known, believ'd, profess'd and practis'd*, but Fundamentals? And may not the same Demand be made upon him that he makes upon others, to let us know what these Fundamentals are? And the Demand is more just upon him, because he supposes 'em to be necessary to all Mankind, which we do not suppose concerning the Fundamentals of the Christian Religion as such, which those only can be bound to believe or profess who have heard of the Gospel. And as there must
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* P. 374.

† P. 217, 218.

be Fundamentals in natural as well as reveal'd Religion, so there is no Probability that the Deists, any more than the Christians, wou'd all agree in the same Set of Fundamentals. Some might probably reckon the Doctrine of a Providence, Man's Free-agency, the natural Difference between moral Good and Evil, a State of future Retributions, among Fundamentals necessary to be believ'd; others wou'd reject many of these, and either believe 'em not to be true, or not to be necessary. It is well known that the Enemies of Revelation are divided in these Points. They agree in nothing but in their Opposition to Christianity. And as the Deists wou'd thus differ in their Creed, so if any of them shou'd agree *in the same Set of Fundamentals*, there is great Probability that they *wou'd widely differ in explaining them*; I don't doubt as widely as Christians do in what they suppose Fundamentals. If therefore it proves that Christians can have no Assurance that they do not err most dangerously, because there have been Divisions about the Articles of the Christian Faith; must it not equally prove, that the Deists can have no Assurance that they do not err most dangerously, since there have been and are great Divisions about the Articles of natural Religion, or those Things which he supposes it to be the Will of God they shou'd know, believe, and profess? These Things he supposes to be so very clear and plain, that every Man that attends to the Light given him may easily know them; so that the Plea of Sincerity (which, according to him, includes a Man's making the best Use of his Reason and moral Agency in the Circumstances he is in) can have no place in Errors of this kind.

The Author probably is not insensible of these Difficulties; and therefore he has, tho' in contradiction to himself, fix'd on another Expedient, to make the Deists and all others easy; and that is, that

no Principles or Opinions at all are of any consequence to human Happiness; and therefore Persons need not trouble their Heads about them. This seems to be the Design of what he proposes, p. 412, 413 *. Having expos'd, as he thinks, Dr. *Clark's* Assertion, that Christians have the Means and Opportunities of obtaining a higher Degree of Happiness than the Heathens, he adds, " that this is a Notion
" which lays a Foundation for everlasting Persecu-
" tion, since it will oblige Men, as they love their
" Children, Families, Friends, Neighbours and
" Relations, to use any Means, come into any per-
" secuting Measures, to prevent such Opinions from
" spreading, as they imagine wou'd deprive them
" of that Degree of Happiness, which otherwise they
" might ever enjoy; and is it not chiefly owing to
" this Absurdity, that even the most moderate of
" the different Sects are far from treating one
" another with that Benevolence which the common
" Ties of Humanity require?" And then he tells
" us, that " did Men believe that all who were
" equally sincere were equally acceptable with God,
" there cou'd be no Pretence for the least Partiality,
" much less for Persecution, either positive or ne-
" gative: Nor cou'd any Man love another the
" less for the widest Difference in Opinions; and
" then of course Men's Indignation wou'd be wholly
" bent against Immorality, &c." He adds, that
" this Principle, and this alone, wou'd cause uni-
" versal Love and Benevolence among the whole
" Race of Mankind: And did it prevail, must soon
" produce a new and glorious Face of Things; or
" in the Scripture-Phrase, a new Heaven and a
" new Earth."

It is plain here that the Author supposes, that as long as Men look upon any Principles at all to be of great Importance to the Happiness of Mankind,
and

* P. 373. 374.

and upon other Principles to have a pernicious Influence, this will lay a Foundation for everlasting Persecution; since this will oblige them to use any Means, and come into any persecuting Measures, to spread those Principles which they think to be of consequence to their Happiness, and to hinder the spreading of others which they look upon as pernicious, and of an ill Tendency. Accordingly the Remedy which he here recommends for the preventing Persecution, and introducing universal Benevolence, seems to be this, to regard no Principles at all as either conducive to our Happiness, or as having an ill Influence upon it; that is, to look upon all Opinions as indifferent and of small moment. And now this may let us into a true Discovery of the Author's Views, that his Design in saying that where Men are equally sincere they are equally acceptable to God, is this, that it is of no Consequence to a Man what Religion he is of, or what Principles he holds; and if this proves that there is no Necessity of believing Revelation, and that Men need not concern themselves about it; it equally proves the Non-necessity of natural Religion too; that they need not trouble their Heads, whether they believe aright in these Things any more than in Points of pure Revelation. It is of no consequence to us whether we have just Notions of God or of his Attributes, or of the Worship we render him, or of the Duties we owe to God, to ourselves, or to one another. If he says, that some Knowledge of these is necessary in order to the Practice of Morality, or of the Duties incumbent upon us, then this is to own that some Principles are of great Importance to our Happiness, and that we ought to regard them as such, and therefore cannot possibly regard them as indifferent, nor can help looking on the contrary as dangerous; which, according to him, leads to Persecution and subverts that blessed

State

State of Things, that *new Heaven and new Earth* which he so gloriously describes, and by which he seems to mean no other than an universal Indifferency to all Religion.

Indeed the Way of arguing he makes use of to fix the Charge of Persecution upon the Advocates of Revelation, will equally fix it upon all those who have the Interests of natural Religion at heart. 'Tis certain that any Man that is a true Deist and really believes the great Principles of natural Religion, relating to the Being, and Attributes, and Providence of God, Men's Free-agency, a future State of Retributions, and the natural Differences between Good and Evil, must necessarily look upon these Principles to be of very great Importance to the Glory of God, and to the Good of Mankind, and to the Cause of Virtue in the World. And whilst he thinks so, it is impossible, if he has a just Concern for the Interests of Virtue and the Good of Mankind, but he must be concern'd for the maintaining and spreading those Principles; and on the other hand, he ought, if he acts consistently, to have as great an Abhorrence of the contrary Principles of the Atheist and Epicurean as the Christian has; he must necessarily think them of the most pernicious Consequence to Mankind, and therefore must be solicitous to use all lawful Means in his power to prevent the spreading of such mischievous Principles; nor can he have the same Esteem for those that propagate such Principles, and whom therefore he cannot but look upon as Enemies to the Cause of Virtue, as for those that promote it. Supposing Men's *Indignation bent wholly against Immorality* (as this Gentleman requires) they must of course have a very ill Opinion of those Principles, and have a Zeal against them, which they think encourage Immorality, and have a Tendency to weaken the Interests of Virtue, and to promote Vice and Wickedness. Thus the late
Lord

Lord *Shaftsbury* manifests a noble Zeal against those that, like *Hobbes*, deny the natural Differences of Good and Evil, and it is evident that he looks upon them as advancing a Scheme destructive of all Virtue.

Nor wou'd it alter the Case, though we suppos'd, that *all that are equally sincere are equally acceptable with God*, which is the Principle the Author advances, as what wou'd effectually prevent Men's loving one another the less, for the widest Difference in Opinions; for still, whilst a Man regards some Principles as of most pernicious Consequence to the Interests of Virtue and to the Happiness of Mankind, he must have a Zeal against those Principles, and must think the Authors and Abettors of them very ill employ'd, and have no very good Opinion of their Sincerity; especially if we take Sincerity in that Notion which this Gentleman himself has advanc'd, for a Man's making the best Use of his Reason, and the best Improvement of his moral Agency which he is capable of, which I believe a true Deist could not think the Atheist or *Epicurean* to have done.

The Argument we are now upon furnishes a new Proof of this Writer's Inconsistency. For though here he seems to prescribe the looking upon all Opinions to be alike indifferent, as the only way to avoid Persecution and promote universal Benevolence; yet in other Places, he frequently supposes some Principles to be of great Importance to the Good of Mankind, and others to be of a quite contrary Tendency. Indeed, the very Design of his whole Book is to shew the mischievous Tendency of some Opinions and Principles, and the Excellency of others, particularly of his own, which he represents as every way amiable and beneficial. He tells us, in the Passage cited before, of an *universal Religion* which *all have been ever bound to believe and practise*; and

and that God design'd all Mankind shou'd at all Times know what he wills them to know, believe, profess and practise. Now any one that really believes this, cannot possibly regard all Opinions as alike indifferent. He must believe that some Principles are of great Importance, and must therefore, if he acts consistently, be solicitous to maintain and promote those Principles which he thinks it is the Will of God we should know, believe, and profess, and to discourage and prevent the spreading of such Principles as he thinks are contrary to them, and subversive of them.

Accordingly, when he is giving an Account of what those of the meanest Capacity may easily know concerning the Duty they owe to God, he asks, " Can't they tell what Sentiments inspire them with " Love and Reverence for the Deity? and need " they much Reflection to know, that the more any " Sentiments do this, the more they ought to be " cherish'd? and that, as they ought themselves to " have the highest Ideas of Love and Veneration " for their Creator and Benefactor, so they should, on " all proper Occasions, endeavour to excite the same " in others, p. 280*." This is strongly expressed to signify, that the Law of Nature it self obliges all Mankind, even those of the meanest Capacities, to cherish those Notions which they find inspire them with Love and Veneration for the Deity, and to endeavour to excite the same Sentiments in others; and consequently to use all proper Endeavours in their power to spread and propagate those Notions. And when he there adds, that " as they cannot but " see that it wou'd be, in them, affronting God, to " offer him a Worship which they believe he abhors, so they must think it the same in others:." The natural Consequence of this is, that they must endeavour, by all proper means in their power,

to prevent others affronting him as well as themselves. And now, is not this Scheme of the Author's chargeable with all those Consequences he lays upon others? Might it not be said, with equal Justice, that "this is a Notion which lays a Foundation for everlasting Persecution, since it will oblige
" Men, as they love their Children, Families,
" Friends, Neighbours and Relations, to use any
" Means, come into any persecuting Measures, to
" prevent such Opinions from spreading, as they
" imagine would deprive them of that Degree of
" Happiness which otherwise they might ever
" enjoy."

Thus might the Author's Charge of countenancing Persecution be easily turn'd upon himself. Indeed the Method which he seems here to propose as the only effectual Remedy against it, *viz.* the looking upon no Principles whatsoever as of any Importance to Happiness, is both plainly inconsistent with what he himself advances in other Passages of his Book, as hath been now shewn, and is in itself absolutely impracticable. It appears that the true Deist as well as the Christian, must necessarily suppose some Principles to be of great Importance, and the contrary ones to be of a pernicious Tendency. Nor can the Atheist himself admit all Principles or Opinions to be equal, with regard to their Influence on human Happiness. He must look upon the Doctrines of a governing Providence, and a State of future Retributions, to lay a Foundation for all kind of Bigotry, and the worst of Evils, Superstition, and therefore to be contrary to the Happiness of Mankind, and that his own Scheme is the only way to free them from needless Anxieties and Terrors; and accordingly, there have been Atheists as zealous to propagate their own Opinions, as any Set of Men whatsoever. Thus the Author, whilst he pretends to be such an Enemy to Persecution,
proposes

proposes no other Remedy for avoiding it, but what is on every Supposition impracticable, and can never take Effect.

Yea, he seems to me to justify that Principle which has been the true Source of Persecution in every Age; and that is, that it is lawful and just to use any Methods, or come into any Measures whatsoever, to propagate those Principles that are of Importance to human Happiness, and to hinder and suppress those Principles that are of a pernicious Tendency. This is evident from what he says in the Passage before cited, where speaking of Men's having a Notion that some Principles are of great Importance to their obtaining a higher Happiness, he adds, that this *will oblige them*, as they love their Families, Friends, Neighbours, *to use any Means, come into any persecuting Measures*, to prevent such Opinions from spreading, as they imagine, wou'd deprive them of that Degree of Happiness, which otherwise they might ever enjoy, p. 412 *. And elsewhere, speaking of those that suppose some Doctrines to be necessary to Salvation, he saith, "if they think such Things necessary to Salvation, *they must suppose it their Duty* to use such Means as will *most effectually* serve that purpose, and that God, in requiring the End, requires all those Means that will best secure and propagate it; p. 151 †." Where he seems to think that supposing the Premises true, that there are Doctrines necessary, and which it is the Will of God they shou'd believe, the Conclusion is just, that they may, nay *they ought, they must suppose it their Duty* to use any Means to propagate them, that they think will be most *effectual*; and particularly he shews, that they must, in this Case, think it their Duty to use Force, or violent Methods to *prevent Damnable Opinions from spreading*, p. 155. ||

X 2

And

* P. 373. † P. 133. || P. 135.

And that they must use Fraud too, to *deceive Men for their eternal Good, and hinder them from imbibing poisonous Doctrines*, p. 157 *.

I don't see therefore, but that if this Gentleman can bring himself to think, that there are some Principles of great Importance to the Happiness of Mankind, (and he plainly supposes that the Principles he himself has advanc'd in his Book are such,) and that there are other Principles of a very pernicious Influence and Tendency, (and this Charge he often advances against the Principles of those whom he thinks fit to oppose, and indeed of all that stand up for an external Revelation,) I don't see but, upon this View, he may think it lawful, and even his Duty, to use any Means, or come into any Measures whatsoever, that may be most effectual to propagate the one and hinder the spreading of the other. That his Principles wou'd allow him to use Fraud for so good an End, none can doubt, that considers the Doctrine he advances, that Truth is to be judg'd by its Tendency, that Falshood is lawful, and even a Duty, when it tends to the publick Good, yea and even to our own private Benefit, and that it is lawful to deceive Men for their Advantage. He often bitterly inveighs against the pious Frauds of Ecclesiasticks, and yet he and they agree in the Principle, only they differ in the Application of it; because they probably thought many Things to be for the Good of others, which he does not think so; but why might they not act according to their Persuasion, as well as he according to his? And indeed, if we may judge by the many unfair Quotations and plain Misrepresentations of the Sense of Adversaries, with many other Arts little reconcileable to Truth or Candour, so usual with this Writer and other Fellow-Labourers in the same Cause, they seem to think any Methods lawful, though

* P. 138.

though never so unfair and disingenuous, in order to obtain their End, the weakning or destroying the Authority of divine Revelation. Nor am I sure that he would scruple Force any more than Fraud for so good an End. That strange Spirit of Bitterness, which, notwithstanding the fair Semblance of Moderation he puts on, so often discovers itself in his Book, might, for aught I know, carry him to the Extremes of Rage and Violence; and since he advances it as a Maxim, that the Goodness of Actions is to be measured wholly by the Tendency of them, I don't know but he might think violent Methods, in some Cases, good and necessary for so valuable an End. Indeed when I consider that he finds fault with that Precept of our Saviour that teaches us to love our Enemies, and that he urges it as our Duty to hate ill Men, not merely their Actions but their Persons, p. 342 *. when I consider that he represents the Clergy, and all those that are for positive Precepts in Religion, that is, almost all Christians, in all Ages, as *Demonists*, and Divines in all Ages, as for the most part *mortal Enemies to the Exercise of Reason*, and *below Brutes*, p. 277, 278 †. I must own that the Spirit of this Author seems to me to be so contrary to the mild and gentle Spirit of the Gospel, that I shou'd be loth such as he had it in their power to do what their Inclinations might prompt 'em to, against the Professors of Christianity. I am apt to think that all those who are zealous for the Authority of the Scriptures, wou'd pass for the Advocates of a false and pernicious Superstition; and Superstition is worse, in this Gentleman's Opinion, than Atheism. I am not certain therefore, but he might persuade himself that it was for the publick Good to banish or destroy them.

Upon the whole, I don't see any Necessity we are under to have recourse to this Author in order to

* P. 309, 310. † P. 250, 251.

our being deliver'd from Persecution, and to our being brought to a friendly Disposition towards one another. I think the Gospel has a much happier Tendency this way, than the Scheme of Principles he wou'd introduce. Those that govern themselves by its Principles and Precepts, however zealous they may be by all Methods consistent with Truth, Humanity, and Charity, to spread those Doctrines which they cannot but believe to be of great Importance, yet will never allow themselves to use any Methods either of Fraud or Violence for so excellent an End; their Zeal will be pure and peaceable, free from all Bitterness and Guile; nor will they think it lawful for them to *do Evil that Good may come of it*, a Maxim absolutely condemn'd by the Gospel, though there is Reason to think that it is not altogether disapprov'd by the Author, who is for having the Goodness of Actions measur'd wholly by their Tendency.

If, as he tells us, "there's no Part of natural Religion but what highly tends to improve a social and benign Temper, p. 405*;" 'tis undeniably evident, that nothing can have a greater Tendency to form the Minds of Men to a kind, benign, benevolent Disposition, than the Gospel of Jesus. It not only confirms all that natural Religion suggests on this Head, but furnishes many additional Motives, the strongest that can be conceiv'd. It every where breathes universal Benevolence and Good-will towards Mankind, and allows us not (what this Gentleman thinks the Law of Nature allows us) to *hate even our Enemies*. When therefore after having commended natural Religion for its Tendency to improve this benign Temper, he immediately adds, that "what in most Places passes for the Christian Religion, has transform'd this benign Creature into one fierce and cruel, and made him act with such Rage and Fury, against those

* P. 367.

“ those who never did him the least Injury, as cou’d
“ not have entred into the Hearts of Men, even
“ though they were in the Doctor’s unavoidable
“ State of Degeneracy and Corruption; p. 406.”
’Tis observable, that he dare not say the *Christian Religion* it self as laid down in the Gospel, but *what in most Places passes for the Christian Religion*, has had this Effect. Why then did he not, when he had so fair an Opportunity, take this Occasion to acknowledge the admirable Tendency the Gospel hath to cultivate and improve this kind and benign Disposition? Why did he not endeavour to recover Men to the true original Spirit of Christianity, and to that End ingage them to read and study their Bibles, and to take their Religion from thence, and govern themselves by the excellent Principles and Precepts of the Gospel? As to his Insinuation, that the Rage and Fury that Christians have fallen into *cou’d not have entred into the Hearts of Men, even though they were in the Doctor’s unavoidable State of Corruption and Degeneracy*; I wou’d only ask, what does he think of the Heathen Persecutions? Did not they set the execrable Pattern of persecuting for Conscience-sake? Though it must be own’d this has been improv’d upon since; the Art of Persecution, like other Things, gathering Strength by long Practice. The Practice of putting Persons to death for Conscience-sake, did not obtain among Christians till the Purity of the Christian Doctrine was in a great measure lost; it came to its Height under the Papal Usurpation, which is the greatest Corruption of the Christian Religion, and it was chiefly in Defence of Pagan Idolatries and Superstitions, though cloath’d with a Christian Name, that those Cruelties and Persecutions have been practis’d. And it is very hard that Christianity shou’d be made accountable for Practices that are manifestly owing to Men’s Deviation from it, and most directly con-

trary to the Spirit and Genius of the Gospel. If Men cou'd but be perswaded to govern themselves by the excellent Principles and Precepts of Christianity, this wou'd be the most effectual Way to produce that new and glorious Face of Things, that Heaven upon Earth, which this Gentleman speaks of, to extinguish all Hatred and Revenge, and introduce a universal Benevolence and brotherly Affection. But if the Gospel, which every where breathes a Spirit of Love and Goodness, which proposes the most admirable Precepts of Benevolence and Charity, and inforces them by the most powerful and ingaging Motives, and sets before us a living Example of the most consummate Love to Mankind in the Son of God in our Nature; if this can't extinguish Animosities, nor ingage Men to mutual Love, I am afraid the Author's Scheme will never do it. Shall he who allows us to hate our Enemies, to avenge Injuries, &c. be thought a greater Promoter of Peace and Charity, and Good-will towards Mankind, than he that requires us to love our Enemies, to do good to them that hate us and despitefully use us, and forgive those that have injur'd us? No more than he can be accounted a greater Friend to the sacred Interests of Truth, who allows Men to lye and to deceive when they think it for their Benefit to do so, than he who commands us to lye not at all, and not to do Evil that Good may come of it.

I have now finish'd my Remarks on this Author's Scheme; and now I may leave it to the Reader whether it deserves all those glorious Encomiums he himself is pleas'd to bestow upon it. He tells us in his Preface, that " he has laid down such plain
 " and evident Rules, as may enable Men of the
 " meanest Capacity, to distinguish between Reli-
 " gion and Superstition; and has represented the
 " former in every Part so beautiful, so amiable,
 " and

“ and so strongly affecting, that they who in the
“ least reflect, must be highly in love with it.”

And he concludes his Book with a Panegyrick on
his own Performance. That by this Attempt of
his, “ as nothing but Rubbish is remov’d, nothing
“ but what is either inconsistent with, or at least
“ takes off from the full Exercise of Piety and Vir-
“ tue; so every thing is advanc’d which tends to pro-
“ mote the Honour of God, and the Happiness of
“ human Societies, p. 421*.” That “ there is
“ none who wish well to Mankind, but must also
“ wish his Hypothesis to be true; and there cannot
“ be a greater Proof of its Truth, than that it is
“ in all its Parts so exactly calculated for the Good
“ of Mankind, that either to add to or take from
“ it, will be to their manifest Prejudice, p. 422.”
That “ the Religion he teaches is most worthy of
“ God, most friendly to Society, most helpful to
“ Government, and most beneficial to every Indi-
“ vidual; that it is a Religion, as he hopes he has
“ fully prov’d, founded upon such demonstrable
“ Principles, as are obvious to the meanest Capa-
“ city; and most effectually prevents the Growth
“ both of Scepticism and Enthusiasm.” And he
concludes his Book with declaring, that “ he is
“ ready to give up his Hypothesis, if another
“ can be named, attended with fewer Difficulties,
“ and that if he has advanc’d any Notion which does
“ not *naturally* and *necessarily* shew it self to be the
“ Will of God, by tending to promote his Ho-
“ nour and the Good of Men, he is willing intirely
to renounce it, and by not persisting to defend
“ Error, to give this uncommon Mark of an ingenu-
“ ous Disposition, *Errare possum, Hereticus esse*
“ *nolo.*”

How far the Author may think himself oblig’d to
put these Professions in practice, to shew his Inge-
nuity

nuity and Candor, I cannot pretend to tell; but I think it has been shewn, that some of the Notions he has advanc'd are neither for the Honour of God nor for the Good of Mankind. I cannot but look upon it to be highly derogatory to the Honour of God to assert, as this Writer does, that it wou'd be Tyranny in God to command us in any thing, which taken absolutely and in general is of an indifferent Nature, or to institute any positive Rites in his own Worship; and that we are not oblig'd to obey him in any Instance, except we see that that very Thing has a natural Tendency to promote our own Interest; which is not to allow him as great a Power over his Creatures, as earthly Parents and Masters have over their Children and Servants. Nor can I see how he can justly pretend to consult the Honour of God, who ridicules those that talk of the Dignity of the divine Government, and represents him as perfectly unconcern'd, as to what regards his own Authority, whether his Laws be observ'd or not; or who leads Men to think that though they do not render God any immediate Worship at all, provided they apply themselves to social Duties, they answer the End of their Being, and do all that God requires; which is under Pretence of high Notions of God's Perfection and Happiness in himself to compliment him out of the World, and make it unnecessary to have any immediate Regard to him at all in Religion.

The Author's Scheme appears to me, to be as little for the Good of Mankind as for the Honour of God. It has been shewn, that whilst he pretends a mighty Zeal for Virtue, he in effect deprives it of some of its strongest Supports and most powerful Motives, and takes away the most effectual Restraints from Vice; that his Scheme tends to weaken the Hopes and Joys of good Men, and to deliver the Wicked from the Terrors of divine Judgment,
(though

(though it is for the Good of the World that such Persons shou'd be still kept under the Power of those Terrors) and to make Men look upon Sin as a slight and inconsiderable Evil. He pretends to deliver Men from Superstition, but takes away the Authority of the Scriptures, which is the most effectual Remedy against it; and though he will not allow God to institute any positive Rites in his own Worship, of which he is undoubtedly the properest Judge, yet he leaves Men at full Liberty to follow their own Inventions in this Matter, which in all Ages has been the most fruitful Source of the most absurd Superstitions. He inveighs vehemently against Persecution, yet he seems to allow that which has been the great Principle of Persecution in all Ages, and that is, that provided Men do but think any Opinions to be of Consequence to human Happiness, (which it is impossible in many Cases to help thinking) they are oblig'd, even by Charity it self, to use any Means, or come into any persecuting Measures to promote them, and to hinder the contrary Opinions from spreading. He pretends a great Love to Truth, and Zeal against pious Frauds, and yet he lays down Principles which dissolve the Obligations of Truth and Faith among Men, and give free Scope to Falshood and Deceit; which is of the worst Consequence to human Society. He gives a large Indulgence to Men's Appetites and Passions, leaving Men to gratify them as far as they themselves think reasonable, or most for their own Happiness in the Circumstances they are in, without any other divine Law to restrain and govern them.

His Scheme is not only contrary to the Honour of God and the Good of Mankind, but in all its Parts inconsistent with it self. What he offers to prove the absolute Perfection of the Law of Nature, is inconsistent with its suppos'd Clearness to all Mankind;

kind; and what he offers to shew that it is absolutely clear and known in all its Extent to all Mankind, leaves no room for the Plea of Sincerity, which yet he sometimes lays so great a Stress upon; as an Excuse for Mistakes and Errors in Religion. He frequently praises the Philosophers, and supposes their Writings may be of signal Use to give Men clearer Notions of their Duty and of the Law of Nature, and yet will not allow, that a Revelation from God can be of any Use at all, to render the Religion of Nature clearer to any Man, than it is to all Men without it. He often supposes, that all Men have an equal Light given them, that the Light of Nature is equally clear to all, and equally discoverable by all, the Illiterate as well as the Learned, and yet in other Places, talks of Men's knowing the Law of Nature, and discovering the Will of God, *as far as their Circumstances permit*; which supposes, that all Men have not equal Means and Advantages for knowing and discovering that Law. He raises a mighty Clamour against those that suppose the Heathen World to have been in a State of great Corruption and Degeneracy, though they suppose this originally owing to their own Fault, and yet he himself supposes them and all Mankind, in all Ages, (all but the *free-thinking Few*) to have been involv'd in Superstition, which he looks upon as the worst State Mankind can be in, and this too as the Effect of an original Weakness in the human Nature. And whilst he sets up for vindicating the Right of the Heathens to Happiness, he advances such a Scheme, as if true, wou'd prove that there scarce was such a thing as a sincere *well-meaning Gentile* for many Ages, all chargeable with counteracting the clearest universal Light, and therefore all destitute of that Sincerity which he makes to be the only Title to Happiness. He sometimes makes the Doctrine of future Retributions a Part of the Deist's Creed, and
of

of great Use to make Men good and in love with their Duty; at other Times he discards all this as mean and servile, destroying the Merit of Men's Services: so that the true Deist, sometimes, is one that believes future Rewards and Punishments; at other times, one that has no Regard to any such Thing. He frequently makes a Man's own Happiness and Interest the only Measure of his Obedience, and that no Man can be oblig'd to any Thing but what some way or other contributes to his own Advantage; at other times he sets up for a disinterested Virtue, without any Regard to a Man's own Interest and Happiness at all. He sometimes talks of the Duties we owe to God, as distinct from those we owe to our Neighbours and our selves; and in many other Places represents the Duties we owe to our Neighbours, as the whole of Religion, and all that God requires. He often talks of the Immutability of the Law of Nature, and yet according to him, there are no fix'd unchangeable Rules of Morality at all; the Goodness of Actions is to be wholly measur'd by their Tendency, and this is to be judg'd by the Circumstances a Man is under, which Circumstances, he says, are continually changing. He frequently supposes, that the Knowledge of the Law of Nature is necessary, and that this is the one true Religion which all have been ever bound to believe, know, profess, and practise; and yet at other times, he supposes that there are no Principles at all necessary to be believ'd and profess'd, or to be regarded as of Importance to human Happiness, and seems to recommend an universal Indifferency to all Religion.

I think I may now leave it to the Reader, whether the civil Epithet he bestows upon the Scheme of the Advocates for Revelation, be not much more justly applicable to his own, that it is a *self-confounding Scheme*; and whether the Charge he advances

against the learned Dr. *Clark*, that he introduces *universal Scepticism*, p. 381, 382*. may not be very properly turn'd upon himself, who seems scarce to have any fixed Principles at all, but is continually fluctuating, subverting in one Part of his Book, what he affirms in another? This Author's Attempt is a new Proof of the miserable Shifts the Enemies of Christianity are reduc'd to, and that whilst they endeavour to destroy the Authority of Revelation, they do really confound themselves. The Scheme which he has dress'd up with so much Art and Care in opposition to Christianity, however plausible it may seem to be at first View, appears upon a nearer Examination to be inconsistent with Reason and with it self. I have not so mean an Opinion of the Author's Abilities, as to think this is owing to his own Want of Capacity; he has done it to as much Advantage, as the Cause he had undertaken wou'd admit; though one wou'd have expected, that when he is pretending to describe a Religion, which he supposes to be so very obvious to all Mankind, and which it is the Will of God all Men shou'd believe, know, profess, and practise, the Account given of it shou'd be clear, easy, and consistent. I think it may be concluded from his Book, what wretched Uncertainties we must be reduc'd to, as to many of the Principles and Duties of the Law of Nature it self, and what little Security we cou'd have of its being long maintain'd amongst us, if the Christian Revelation were discarded; and that therefore all that have a true Concern for the Honour of God, for the Good of Mankind, and for the Cause of Virtue in the World, shou'd have a high Esteem for the Christian Religion, to which alone truly belong those Epithets, which the Author vain-gloriously attributes to his own Hypothesis, that it is most friendly to Society, most helpful to Government, and most beneficial to every Individual.

* P. 345, 346.



APPENDIX.

Whether and how far we are oblig'd by the Law of Nature, to believe Things above Reason.

BEFORE I leave this first Part of the Answer, relating to the Account this Author gives of the Law of Nature, it may not be improper to consider, whether the Law of Nature it self obliges us to believe any Propositions concerning Things above Reason. There are several Things in his Book which lead us to consider this Question, which therefore I have chosen to consider distinctly; especially, as what may be offer'd on this Head, may be of no small Use for obviating some of the principal Objections, this Writer makes against the Doctrines of Revelation.

Our Author seems in several Parts of his Book, to deny that the Law or Religion of Nature can at all extend to Things above Reason. As he sets up our Reason for a sovereign Judge in all Things, so his View seems to be to shew that we are never to believe any thing, which we our selves are not able distinctly to explain and to account for. Thus he asks, "Can the eternal Reason of Things extend to Things that do not belong to Reason, or, as Divines speak, are above Reason? p. 367*." And more particularly in his 12th Chapter, p. 222†. he sets himself to prove, that *there are not in Religion Propositions to be believ'd which are above Reason*; he ought to have said, *Propositions concerning Things which are above Reason*. He argues,

" if

* P. 332. † P. 198, 199

“ if I don’t understand the Terms of a Proposition,
 “ or if they are inconsistent with one another, or so un-
 “ certain that I know not what Meaning to fix on
 “ them, here is nothing told me, and consequently
 “ no room for Belief. But in all Cases where I am
 “ capable of understanding a Proposition, ‘tis Rea-
 “ son must inform me, whether it is certain, pro-
 “ bable, or uncertain.” And again, “ it is impos-
 “ sible to believe, when we know not what it is we
 “ are to believe, or to believe an absurd or contra-
 “ dictory Proposition; yet because People may be
 “ brought to fancy they believe such things, there-
 “ fore designing Men, whose Interest it is to con-
 “ found Men’s Understandings, and prevent all In-
 “ quiry, have craftily invented the Notion of be-
 “ lieving Things above Reason *.” He adds, “ that
 “ here

* Our Author here represents the Notion of believing things
 above Reason to be entirely the Invention of designing crafty
 Men, whose interest it is to confound Men’s Understandings,
 and prevent all Inquiry. But the Notion of things above Reason
 is far from being peculiar to Divines, whom undoubtedly this
 Writer here intends by *crafty designing Men*, &c. and whom he
 elsewhere expressly mentions as the Patrons of this Notion. p. 367.
 There have been others as well as Divines, Persons of excellent
 Judgment, and great Friends to free Inquiry, and who were
 never suspected of a design to impose upon and confound Men’s
 Understandings, that yet have thought it just to admit the No-
 tion of things above Reason. I shall only mention two, both
 of them Lay-men, of eminent Note for their Attempts to inform
 and improve Men’s Understandings, and promote useful Know-
 ledge, Mr Boyle and Mr. Locke. That excellent Philosopher,
 the great and good Mr. Boyle, has written a Treatise, which
 he calls a *Discourse of Things above Reason, inquiring whether a*
Philosopher should admit there are any-such. To which are annex-
ed some Advices about judging of Things said to transcend Reason.
 In that Discourse he ranks things above Reason under three
 Heads. The first is of things whose Nature is such, that we are
 not able distinctly and adequately to comprehend it. Such is
 the Almighty God, whose Perfections are so boundless, and his
 Nature so singular, that it is presumption to imagine that such
 finite Beings as our Souls can frame full and adequate Ideas of
 them. The second sort consists of things, which have Proper-
 ties and Ways of Operation, which we cannot intelligibly account
 for,

here the Ravings of an Enthusiast are on a Level with the Dictates of infinite Wisdom, and Nonsense render'd most sacred." From whence he concludes; "that if the Scripture was design'd to be understood, it must be within the Reach of human Understanding, and consequently, can't contain Propositions above or below human Understanding."

Our Author is pleas'd here to make Propositions concerning things above Reason, to be the same with *Absurd and Contradictory* Propositions. But those who have judg'd it necessary to admit the Notion of things above Reason, yet have always distinguish'd between things above Reason and things contrary to Reason, tho' this Writer has thought proper to confound 'em, the more effectually to expose those,

whom for, or explain by any thing we already know. The third sort is of such things that involve some Notion or Proposition that we see not how to reconcile with some other thing that we are persuaded to be Truth; and which are incumbered with Difficulties or Objections that cannot directly and satisfactorily be resolved. All these he calls *privileg'd Things*, because they surpass our Reason, at least so far that they are not to be judg'd of by the same Measures and Rules, by which Men are wont to judge of ordinary things. Accordingly he puts it among the Advices he gives in judging of Things that *transcend Reason*, that a Matter of Fact or other Truth about *privileg'd Things* being prov'd by Arguments competent in their Kind, we ought not to deny it merely because we cannot explain, or perhaps so much as conceive the Modus of it; or because we know not how to reconcile it to something that is true; or because it is liable to ill Consequences, and is incumbered with great Inconveniences. All these things he admirably illustrates and supports by a variety of Instances well urged from Philosophy and natural Theology. And concludes with observing, that we must not expect as to *privileg'd Things*, and the Propositions that may be form'd about them; to resolve all Difficulties and answer all Objections; since we can never directly answer those, which require for their solution a perfect Comprehension of what is infinite.

The other Person I refer to is the acute and sagacious Mr. *Locke*; whom I suppose our Author will not reckon among those designing Men whose Interest it is to confound Men's Understandings. He

whom he argues against. By things above Reason, are not intended things evidently absurd, and contradictory to right Reason; but things which, taken in their full extent, exceed our Comprehension; and which, tho' we have a sufficient proof of their Truth and Certainty, yet are attended with difficulties, which thro' the narrowness of our Minds, and for want of a clear and full Comprehension of them, we are not able to resolve.

I shall not at present inquire, whether the Scripture-Revelation contains any Propositions relating to Things above Reason, which we are bound to believe, but consider the general Question as far as the Law or Religion of Nature is concern'd in it, whether in the Religion of Nature there are not some Propositions to be believ'd concerning Things above Reason. And in treating of this Question I

shall

divides things into those which are according to Reason, those things which are contrary to Reason, and those things which are above Reason. And these things when reveal'd he makes to be the proper Matter of Faith. See *Essay on Hum Underst.* Book 4. Chap. 17. Sect. 23. and Chap. 18. Sect. 7, 9. He frequently sets himself to shew the Shortness of Human Understanding, and how unable we are to comprehend or explain several things of which yet we have an undoubted Certainty. Of which he gives various Instances. Among other things he instances in the very Notion of Body, which is cumbered with some difficulties very hard, and perhaps impossible to be explain'd or understood by us. The Divisibility in *infinitum* of any finite extension involving us, whether we grant or deny it, in Consequences impossible to be explicated, or made in our apprehension consistent. And he would fain know what Substance exists, that has not something in it which manifestly baffles our Understandings. See *Essay on Hum Underst.* Book 2. Chap. 23. and Book 4. Chap. 3. See also his Works, Vol. I. p. 557, 559, 560, 561, 572. He allows therefore that it cannot be a reasonable foundation for rejecting a Doctrine propos'd to us as of divine Revelation, because we cannot comprehend the Manner of it, especially when it relates to the divine Essence; and declares concerning himself, I gratefully receive and rejoice in the Light of divine Revelation, which sets me at rest in many things, the manner of which my poor Reason can by no means make out to me.—I readily believe whatever God has declar'd, tho' my Reason find difficulties in it, which it cannot master. *Ibid.* p. 361, 573.

shall first inquire, whether there are Things above Reason, that is, above *our* Reason; for this is the Point to be considered: And then, whether there are Propositions relating to things above our Reason, which we are oblig'd by the Religion or Law of Nature to believe.

As to the first, that there are Things above our Reason, that is, which taken in their full extent, &c. transcend our Comprehension or Capacity, at least at present, and which, though true and certain in themselves, are attended with Difficulties, which we are not able to explain or to account for; is as evident as it is, that our Faculties or Reason in their present State, are of a very narrow and limited extent. There is nothing more common than this way of speaking, that such or such things are above a Man's Capacity, *that is*, they are such as he is not able clearly to conceive and comprehend. And in this respect, things may be said to be above the Reason or Understanding of a Child, which are yet plain and easy to a Man; things may be above the Understanding or Capacity of one Man, which are not above another's; as to comprehend many of Sir *Isaac Newton's* Demonstrations, the Reasons of State, the Policy of Kingdoms, may in many Cases be above the Reason and Capacity of the Vulgar, and of which they are incompetent Judges; many things may be above our Reason or Comprehension at present, which shall not be so in a future State; and some things, perhaps, may be always above our Reach, which are not above the Understanding or Capacity of an Angel; and consequently, Difficulties which appear to us insuperable, may appear plain and easy to Beings of a superior Order, and whose Understandings and Capacities are of a larger Extent than ours. And there are many things above the Reach and Comprehension of all created Beings, which yet are plain and obvious to the infinite Under-

Y 2

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derstanding of God himself. All this is I think too evident to be denied; and that therefore there are things above our Reason, by which is meant, no more than things that exceed our Capacity, and which, though true and certain in themselves, we are not able to explain or to account for.

This must be own'd by all that will not take upon them to affirm, that our Minds are of so vast an Extent that there is nothing in the whole Compass of things, but what we can clearly comprehend and are competent Judges of; an Assertion so absurd, that I need not take any pains to disprove or expose it. Yet our Author often talks as if this was his Sentiment. He asks, "How can the eternal Reason of Things
 " extend to things that do not belong to Reason,
 " or, as Divines love to speak, are above Reason?" [that is, above *our* Reason] as if the whole eternal Reason of Things were known to us in its full Extent, or as if there were nothing relating to the Reason and Nature of Things throughout the Universe, that transcends our Capacity, or which we are not able to account for. Particularly he sometimes expresses himself as if he thought, that all the Ways of God, and the Methods and Measures of infinite Wisdom, are within the Reach of our Understanding or Capacity. He tells us, p. 191*. that "God
 " cannot otherwise witness for himself, or assert the
 " Wisdom and Goodness of his Conduct, than by
 " submitting his Ways to Men's cool Deliberation
 " and strict Examination; since 'tis from the Marks
 " we discern in the Laws of the Universe and its Government, that we can demonstrate it to be governed by a God of infinite Wisdom and Goodness." But certainly though it be very true that we see numberless Evidences of Wisdom and Goodness in the Frame and in the Government of the Universe, from whence we may conclude that things
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were made and dispos'd by an infinitely wise and good Being; yet it is also equally true, that there are many things in the Frame and Government of the World, many of the Phaenomena of Nature and Providence, which we are not able to account for, and the Reasons and Ends of which we are not able to assign. And the Conduct that Reason directs to in such a Case is this, that since we plainly see such bright and strong Evidences of Wisdom and Goodness in many of the Works that we behold, and the more we know of them the more we see cause to admire the Wisdom and Beauty of the Contrivance; since the whole Frame of Things in general bears such Impressions of Wisdom and Goodness as lead us to a most wise and good and powerful Cause of all things; then where we do not at present see the Reasons of Things, (as in many Cases we do not) we must still believe they are most wisely and justly order'd, as well as where we do see the Reasons of 'em, and must ascribe the seeming Irregularity to the Darkness of our own Minds, and the Narrowness of our own Comprehension. I cannot therefore excuse this Author from an unwarrantable Presumption in saying, that " God cannot otherwise witness
" for himself, or assert the Wisdom and Goodness
" of his Conduct, than by submitting his Ways to
" Men's cool Deliberation and strict Examination."
As if we were in all Cases proper Judges of what God does in the Government of the Universe, and of the Reasons infinite Wisdom may have for taking such Measures or proceeding in such a Course; or as if he were always oblig'd to acquaint us with the Reasons of his Proceedure, or else must be content to suffer his Wisdom and Goodness to be arraign'd and vilified. This Writer indeed produces some Passages of Scripture, in which God condescends to appeal to Men themselves concerning the

Wisdom and Equity of his Ways and Dealings, p. 194.* and it will easily be own'd, that in many Cases the Reasons of his Proceedure are so plain and obvious that all Men may see and judge of them. But the same Scripture assures us, that *as the Heavens are higher than the Earth, so are his Ways and Thoughts above ours; that we know but Part of his Ways, and that his Ways are often in the dark Waters, and his Footsteps are not known; and that though God is righteous in all his Ways, and holy in all he doeth, yet his Judgments are often unsearchable, and his Ways past finding out; and that we cannot by searching find out God, we cannot find out the Almighty unto Perfection.* And this every Man must own, that has a just Notion either of God or of himself. 'Tis certain we know very little of the Laws by which he governs the natural and moral World; there are numberless things relating both to the infinite Nature of God himself, and to his glorious Attributes and Perfections, and to the Methods of his Providence, &c. which we are not able to account for; and no wonder, since through the Narrowness of our Minds we are not able to form a clear and adequate Idea of Things infinite and eternal, nor are we able to carry our Views at once through all the Parts of the Universe, nor consequently to see things in their various Tendencies and Subserviencies, and in their proper Beauty and Harmony, and the Respect they bear to the Whole. Nor can I imagine to my self a more ridiculous Sight, than a poor sorry Creature who is puzzled with every thing about him, who knows not how his own Body and Soul are united, or how he himself moves and sees and feels, or the Manner of Operation of his own Imagination, Memory, &c. yet pretending to so vast a Comprehension, as to be a proper Judge in all Cases of the Nature and Ways
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of God himself, and the Reasons of the divine Proceedings; so that he will not allow any thing to be just or wise, except he can clearly discern it to be so, or that there cou'd be a Reason for any thing if he does not see it. Our Author mentions *Job's* desiring to reason with God, *Job* 13. 3. But he shou'd also have taken notice of his Submission. That holy Man, who in the Agonies of his Grief dropp'd some Expressions that did not shew all the Submission and Veneration that became a Creature towards God, yet upon a Display of the divine Majesty, and the Incomprehensibleness of his Ways, humbly acknowledg'd his Error and Presumption, in presuming rashly to judge of Things so far above his Reach, as the Works and Ways of the Most High; a Conduct which I wish this Gentleman wou'd follow, who talks as pertly all along, as if his Understanding were of so vast an Extent, that God cou'd have no Reason for doing any thing but he must know it. But certainly it is a just Homage we owe to the most wise and righteous Governor of the World (and which he justly requires of his reasonable Creatures) to believe the Wisdom and Equity of his Conduct, even where we cannot distinctly account for it; in such Cases to submit our Reason to God's, that is, to believe that God is wiser than we are, and that he has most just Reasons for every thing he does, though we are not able to see them, is a Duty prescrib'd us by the Law of Nature it self.

And this will clear our way to the next thing I propos'd to consider, and that is, whether since there are things above Reason, there may be Propositions relating to things above Reason, which we are oblig'd by the Law or Religion of Nature to believe. This is necessary to be inquir'd into; for perhaps it might be said, that though there are things above our Reason or Capacity to comprehend, we need not concern our selves about them, and are under no Obligation

gation to believe any thing concerning them. But I think it may be easily shewn, that we are in some Cases as much oblig'd to believe Propositions concerning things of this kind, as concerning any things whatsoever; and that in such Cases not to believe them, merely because of the Difficulties attending them which we are not able to account for, is an unreasonable Conduct, and contrary to the Law of Nature.

Tho' things said to be above Reason, are what we cannot fully comprehend; tho' they have something in them which poses our Faculties, and is disproportionate to our finite Minds: yet this doth not hinder, but that we may form some Idea of them, tho' not a clear and adequate one, and may discourse rationally and usefully concerning them. We have an Idea of God as an infinitely perfect Being, tho' the Notion of infinite Perfection manifestly includes something in it, above the reach of our Faculties. Mr. *Locke* observes, that it is Infinity, which join'd to our Ideas of Existence, Power, Knowledge, &c. makes that complex Idea whereby we represent to our selves the best we can the Supreme Being, which we call God; and that the degrees or extent of these, which we ascribe to that sovereign Being, are all boundless and infinite. And it is certain, that of what is boundless and infinite, we have no clear and adequate Idea, nor can our Faculties grasp or comprehend it: but yet we must not for that reason discard all Conceptions or Discourse about that which is infinite, or pretend that we are under no obligation to believe any thing concerning it. But this will be render'd plainer by mentioning some particular Instances.

Thus, e.g. it is an Article of natural Religion, and which I am bound to believe, that God is eternal, or exists from everlasting to everlasting; yet when I set my self to conceive Eternity, I am soon

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confounded, and whatever Hypothesis I chuse, meet with Difficulties which I am not able to explain. I am also bound to believe that God is immense, or every where present, though what kind of Presence this is, or after what manner he is present, I cannot explain or account for. I believe for very good Reasons that God knows all things, and that he fore-knows future Contingencies; but the Manner how he does so, I am not able to describe. And I believe that God's Prescience and Man's Free-Agency are perfectly consistent with one another, though it has puzzled some of the most penetrating Wits in all Ages how to reconcile them. I believe that God created the World, though the Manner of his doing it is above my Comprehension.

And with respect to the Methods of divine Providence; it is certain that God permits Sin and Misery, that he suffers Mankind to fall into a very degenerate State, and the greatest Part of 'em in all Ages, to be over-run with Barbarism and Superstition. Yea, this Author believes that God made human Nature with an original Foible or Weakness, that makes Men liable to be practis'd on, and exposes them in all Ages, an easy Prey to Impostors. It is also certain in Fact, that though he be the common Parent of all Mankind, yet he remarkably distinguishes some of the human Race, yea some whole Nations above others, and gives them much greater Advantages for their Improvement in Knowledge and Virtue, and consequently in Happiness. Now the Ends and Reasons of these things we are in a great measure unacquainted with, and not able to account for, and therefore these may be justly said to be things above our Reason or Comprehension, at least at present, till we obtain a fuller and more comprehensive View of Things, which perhaps we may have in a future State. Yet there are Propositions concerning these things, which we are bound
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to believe; *e. g.* we are oblig'd to believe that God's permitting Sin and Misery, his giving some of the human Race much greater Advantages for Improvement than others, is most wise and just and reasonable, though we can't clearly comprehend or penetrate into the Reasons of it.

And this is a Duty necessarily incumbent upon us from the Law of Nature it self, according to the Definition our Author gives of it, and which has been mention'd above, *viz. that it is the Sense and Practice of those Duties, which result from the Knowledge we by our Reason have of God and his Perfections, and of our selves and our own Imperfections.* For it is a Duty becoming such short-sighted imperfect Creatures towards the supreme and infinitely perfect Being, to believe that whatever Method of Proceedure he takes is perfectly wise and just and good, though the Reasons and Ends upon which he proceeds are things above our Reach, and what we are not at present able to account for.

Thus it appears, that there are Propositions concerning things above our Reason or Comprehension, which yet we are oblig'd by the Law of Nature to believe; and he that shou'd refuse to believe such things for no other Reason, but because there are Difficulties attending them, which he cannot solve, and because he cannot explain how these things are so; *e. g.* he that shou'd refuse to believe that God is eternal, because he cannot form a clear and consistent Notion of Eternity; he that shou'd refuse to believe that God is every where present, because what kind of Presence this is, or how he is every where present he is not able to conceive; or that shou'd not believe that God knows our Thoughts, or fore-knows future Contingencies, or that he created the World out of nothing, that is, gave Being to that which had none before, merely because he has no Notion of the Manner how these things
could

could be done, wou'd act a most absurd and unreasonable Part, contrary to the Law of Nature, and which wou'd terminate in downright Atheism. And the Atheist believes Things still more incomprehensible than these, and which indeed are infinitely absurd.

Let us now examine what our Author offers on this Subject. He argues, "If I don't understand the Terms of a Proposition, or if they are inconsistent with one another, or so uncertain, that I know not what Meaning to fix on them, here is nothing told me, and consequently no room for Belief."

It will easily be acknowledged, that where the Terms of a Proposition are absolutely unintelligible, so that I can have no Idea or Conception at all of the Meaning of those Terms, there is nothing told me, and consequently no room for Assent or Belief, no more than I can reasonably assent to a Proposition deliver'd in a Language that is utterly unknown to me. But it is far from being true, tho' our Author here seems to take it for granted, that in Propositions concerning Things above Reason, the Terms of the Proposition must be absolutely unintelligible. For tho' the Things themselves may have something in them above my Reach, and which I am not able distinctly to explain, and be attended with Difficulties that I cannot solve, yet there may be a sufficient Reason to affirm or deny something concerning them; and I may understand in that Case what I affirm or deny, and why I do so; or in other Words, I may have a sufficient Understanding of the Terms of a Proposition to make my Assent to it reasonable, though the Thing intended by those Terms be a Thing of which I have not a clear and adequate Idea. Thus, *e. g.* that God is eternal, is an intelligible Proposition, though the Manner and Nature of this Eternity I am not able to explain; that God has created the World, that he is every where present, that he fore-knows future Contingencies;

gencies; the Propositions here relate to Things above our Capacity to explain or account for, but yet the Propositions themselves are intelligible, and we cannot be said in these Cases to believe we know not what; for we know and are certain, for very good Reasons, of the Reality of those Things which we affirm and believe, though if call'd to explain the Manner how these Things are so, we are not able to give a consistent Account or Explication of them. What I believe in all these Cases I know by sufficient Evidence or Argument, which makes that Belief a reasonable Assent, and my not being able to explain the Manner of them, which is a Thing I do not know, is no Reason for my not believing the Reality of them, which is a Thing I do know. Thus to keep to the Instances already alledg'd, my not being able to explain what Eternity is, is no Reason for my not believing that God is eternal, which is a Thing of which I have the strongest Evidence; my not being able to explain how he is every where present, is no Proof that therefore he is not omnipresent; and my not being able to explain how he does fore-know future Contingencies, is no Proof that he does not fore-know them; and my not being able to account how this is reconcilable with Man's Free-Agency, is no Proof that therefore these Things cannot be reconcil'd, nor therefore any sufficient Objection against my believing that they are very consistent. In these Cases I have sufficient Ground to proceed upon in affirming what I do affirm concerning them; and my not being able to comprehend or explain the Manner how they can be so, or to answer all the Difficulties that may be objected against them, is to be resolv'd into the Sublimity of the Subject, and the Narrowness of my own Understanding.

When therefore this Author alledges, that "it is impossible to believe when we know not what it

“ is we are to believe, or to believe an absurd and contradictory Proposition;” I easily grant the latter, if he means one that is really contradictory, and appears to us to be so; ’tis impossible to believe it whilst we think it so: but it may be our Fault, that we think that to be absurd that is not so; this may be owing to our rash and hasty judging of Things above our Reach, and of which we are incompetent Judges.

So this Author seems to think it absolutely inconsistent with God’s universal Goodness to do more for some of the human Race, and give them greater Means and Advantages for Improvement, &c. than others; and yet in this he is certainly mistaken, because (as I shall have Occasion to shew afterwards) ’tis evident in Fact that God does make such a Distinction, whether we suppose a Revelation or not. And it is evident also as any first Principle, that God can do nothing but what is just and good; and that therefore the making such a Distinction is very consistent with his universal Goodness; and I am oblig’d for that Reason to believe it so; and that all the Difficulty is owing to the Narrowness of my own Understanding, and the Difficulty wou’d vanish if I had as comprehensive a View of Things as God has. This may be call’d, if he pleases, a submitting our Reason or Understanding to God, which in other Words is no more than to believe that God is wiser than I am, and may have Reasons for Things which I don’t at present see, and for want of seeing may think absurd; in which Case it is my Duty to get over the seeming Absurdity, and to conquer my Prejudices; and not to do so, is a great Fault.

If this Author, by saying that *it is impossible to believe when we know not what we are to believe*, means that we can’t believe a Thing to be true, except we can distinctly know and account for the Manner how it is so, and answer all the Difficulties relating

relating to it; *e. g.* that we can't believe that God's Ways, in the mention'd Instance, are just, except we can distinctly know and explain the Reasons upon which he proceeds; or that we can't believe that God is eternal, immense, and that he knows all Things, except we can distinctly explain what Eternity and Immensity is, and how it is that he knows all Things, it is plainly false: but if he only means, that we cannot believe a Thing to be true, except we know, or have good Reason to assure us that it is true, I own it. Thus, in the Instance mentioned above, I believe that God's Proceedure is wise and just, because I know it to be so, and I know it to be so upon this Ground, or by this Medium, that a Being of infinite Wisdom and Goodness can do or permit nothing but what is wise and just in him to do or permit, which is a self-evident Proposition. And my Ignorance of the particular Reasons of this Proceedure, and my not being able to account for it, is no Argument for my not believing it to be wise and just, when I have otherwise sufficient Evidence of its being so.

“ In all Cases (says this Author) where I am capable
 “ of understanding a Proposition, 'tis Reason must in-
 “ form me, whether it be certain, probable, or uncer-
 “ tain.” This will be easily granted, even with relation
 to Things above Reason, or which transcend our Com-
 prehension; we are to believe no further than we have
 Evidence, either from the Nature of the Thing, or from
 sufficient Testimony. And Reason must judge whe-
 ther the Evidence be sufficient, or in other Words, whe-
 ther we have sufficient Grounds for believing. I add,
 that Reason may inform me, even in Things which, ta-
 ken in their just Extent, are above my Comprehension,
 and which I am not able distinctly to explain, that
 some Propositions relating to them are true, and
 therefore to be believed, as in several of the Instances
 already mentioned; and that the contrary Propo-
 sitions are false. Thus

Thus it appears, that there are Things above our Reason, or which exceed our Capacity in this present State, which, tho' true and certain in themselves, are attended with Difficulties which we are not able to solve, though perhaps they may appear plain and easy to Beings of superior Understandings; and there are Propositions relating to such Subjects which we are oblig'd to believe. Nor does this, as the Author insinuates, *set the Ravings of an Enthusiast on a level with the Dictates of infinite Wisdom, or render Nonsense most sacred.* For we are to believe nothing concerning those Objects that are in the Sense already explain'd above our Reason, but what we have a full Evidence for, and what we have just Grounds to believe. We proceed as much upon Evidence and reasonable Grounds of Assent, in believing Propositions relating to such Subjects, as in believing any Proposition whatsoever. And this Evidence or Ground of believing must either arise from the Reason of the Thing, or from competent Authority. And, in the latter Case, we must have reasonable Grounds to believe that the Authority is sufficient, and safely to be depended on. So that here is a sufficient Security against being impos'd upon, either by Enthusiasts or Impostors.

I think it naturally follows, from what has been now offer'd, that supposing a Revelation from God well attested, and confirm'd by such Proofs and Evidences as can reasonably be desired in such a Case, it is no sufficient Objection against it, that it contains some Doctrines relating to Things which exceed our Comprehension, and which we are not able distinctly to explain or to account for. And those certainly have very narrow Views, who, whilst they pretend a great Zeal for natural Religion, make it an insuperable Objection against Revelation, that it teaches some Doctrines concerning Things, the Manner of which we find it hard to
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conceive. For this, if it prov'd any thing, would prove that natural Religion is to be rejected too, since this also teaches Doctrines concerning Things above our Reason or Comprehension, and has its Mysteries too. Indeed on every Supposition, and whatever Scheme of Religion we chuse, we must still admit some Doctrines or Principles that are attended with Difficulties which we are not able to solve.

I might easily instance in many Things relating to natural Philosophy, where, as all know that are not utter Strangers to those Studies, we are oblig'd to admit many Things as true which we cannot undertake to explain, and which are incumber'd with Difficulties which we know not how to solve. But I have chosen to confine myself to Instances where Religion is concern'd. And since if there be a Revelation at all, it must be suppos'd that we shou'd have some Things there discover'd to us concerning the Nature and Attributes of God and the Counsels of his Will, which we cou'd not otherwise have known at all, or not so certainly; for may justly be expected, that in such a Revelation there may be some Things which we find it very difficult to explain or to account for; which is not owing to any Defect in the Revelation, but to the Nature of the Subject, of which we have no clear and adequate Ideas. And I cannot but think those Gentlemen very unreasonable, who, if a Revelation contains nothing but what is clear and obvious, and easily comprehended, take occasion to represent it as perfectly useless and needless, and that it tells us nothing but what we knew, or might as easily have known before; and if the Revelation contains any Doctrines which are of a sublime and mysterious Nature, and therefore are attended with considerable Difficulties, arising from the Sublimity of the Subject and the Narrowness of our own Understanding, make this an insuperable Objection against receiving it.

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